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DON-A-DREAMS

HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS

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DON-A-DREAMS

DON-A-DREAMS

A STORY OF
LOVE AND YOUTH

BY

HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS
AUTHOR OF "THE SMOKE-EATERS"

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1906

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THE DE VINNE PRESS

FEB 9 1907

TO

"MISTRESS ANNE"

TO REMIND HER OF THE DAYS WHEN SHE, TOO, WAS GRAVE WITH YOUNG CARE AND WEIGHTED DOWN WITH THE PROBLEMS OF A WHOLE UNIVERSE; TO RECALL TO HER SOME OF THOSE TEAR-BRIGHT DREAMS OF THE FUTURE WHOSE REALIZATION IS ALREADY A POSSIBILITY ONLY OF THE PAST; TO BE TO HER A SOUVENIR AND FOND REMEMBRANCER OF HER OWN YOUTH.

H. J. O'H.

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PART I

THE MAKE-BELIEVER

DON-A-DREAMS

I

THE sun was an open hole in the heavens, like the uncovered pot-hole of the kitchen stove. The winds were made by the tossing branches of the garden maples fanning themselves in the heat. The rains soaked through the ground to the ocean of an underworld, on which the crust of the earth was floating; and the street hydrants connected with those waters by a length of pipe. He, himself, was as hollow as a rubber doll, and when he ate he filled himself with food. Up on the tops of the clouds the angels sat in Heaven; and God was a stern father—bearded like Jack's giant—who was engaged in large affairs all day but required a strict account from little boys when He came home from business of an evening and looked down awfully through the roof on children at their prayers.

In short, it was a child's world—that pathetically wonderful world which is such a little round and level of experience surrounded by imagination's so high and misty hills. It was such a world as the old cartographers used to map—with all the poetry and fable of the nursery located in a "Terra Incognita" just over the horizon. For though the boy was six years old, he

was the eldest of a brood of three, his mother had become an invalid, and he had been neglected in his most inquisitive years for the sicklier infants who had succeeded him. The little nursemaid, Nannie, had taught him to read in an "indestructible" copy of "Jack, the Giant-Killer"; and what he had not been able to learn of the world from a volume of Grimm's "Fairy Tales" he had worked out according to his fancy.

When Miss Morris, a visiting governess, succeeded Nannie as his teacher, two small desks were set up for him and Frankie in the playroom, and he began eagerly to learn the game of figures which she called "Arithmetic." But she objected to his methods when she found that 1 was a tall, thin man, and 2 a little old woman bent double, and 3 a fat cook with an apron-string waist, and 4 a boy sitting. There followed explanations of things in general, and Miss Morris spent a morning asking questions and laughing at the answers she got. She set herself, with patience, to correct his mistaken fancies; and he bore it as a child must. But when she said that all fairy tales were untruths and denied Jack and his Giant any existence in reality, he began to doubt her; and after she had gone, he turned to the book itself, and found her word outweighed by the strong authority of the print and the pictures.

He said nothing; he had, already, the habit of silence. But, thereafter, when she taught him that "the world was round like an orange and flattened at the poles," he looked out the playroom window and saw a level earth that stretched away from the

brick-and-stone realities of the street into the sunset glow and horizon clouds of fairyland and "Terra Incognita." When she heard him describe a void of hunger by saying that his legs were empty, and explained to him the tubular construction of his insides, it did not prevent him from keeping his legs as straight as possible under the dinner table so that his food might have an easy passage down to his hollow feet. And although she denied that the crust of the earth floated on water, he watched with as much anxiety as ever how the men dug in the street—afraid that the bottoms would fall out of the drain pits which they were making, and drop them all into the under ocean.

Then, one morning, when she was coming upstairs to teach him, he heard her say to his mother: "He has such babyish fancies about so many things."

His mother replied: "Babyish fancies?" in a tone that resented the criticism of her boy as a reflection on herself.

"Like Santa Claus," Miss Morris added hastily. "Only about other things."

"Well," his mother said, "I think I should leave the child his Santa Claus."

Miss Morris came up to the playroom in high color. As soon as their books were opened, she said to Donald: "I suppose you believe in Santa Claus?"

She smiled as she said it; but he knew that smile.

"Is n't he?" he faltered.

"Is n't he what?"

"Is n't he—really?"

She did not answer. "We 'll begin," she said, "with yesterday's lesson again. You 'll have to make better progress Donald, or Frankie 'll catch up to you."

He made no progress that morning; and when the lessons were finished and Miss Morris had gone, he found himself fallen on a withered day. All the witchery and surprise of his Christmas were threatened; and his mother's "Leave the child his Santa Claus" was as humiliating as Miss Morris's cold smile.

He spread the rug on the floor in the accepted configuration of a battlefield but he lost heart for the game before he had his first fort built and his soldiers drawn up in rank for Frankie's cannonade of marbles. He took hold of the end of the rug, and tossed the whole campaign into the air with a jerk that threw his brother off his balance and bumped the back of his head against the table leg. Frankie went bawling down the stairs; and Don locked the playroom door against the visit of any avenging Nannie.

No one came. He was left to fret about the room in aimless discontent.

Now before every Christmas in the past, he had sent letters to Santa Claus with Nannie's help—letters that had been meaningless scrawls of lead pencil, because he had not then learned to write. He had "posted" them in a crack of the attic floor at the foot of a large post that supported the beams of the roof; and on every Christmas, the toys which he

written for, had been waiting for him in the nursery. It occurred to him, now, that he could use that post to put Santa Claus to the proof. He tore a sheet from his scribbling book, and after a half-hour's labor achieved a letter which was intended to read: "Dear Santa Claus—Please write me a letter. Miss Morris laughed because if I believed in Santa Claus and I want a letter because I never saw you. You won't let us see you. I will write to-morrow or some other day about what I want for Christmas. Please excuse mistakes. I must now say good-bye. So good-bye."

The act relieved him like a prayer; for, of itself, it gave Santa Claus the reality of a being to whom a petition could be sent. He dropped his letter into the crack of the attic floor and felt himself confirmed in his faith.

But Miss Morris, as an educator, held that children should not be brought up on lies; and every day she explored his mind for more of this "nursery nonsense"; and every day, she let the cold daylight of common sense in on some cherished corner of his twilight world. The snow that had begun to fall, melting, on the warm earth, had *not* been shoveled over the edges of the clouds by any celestial gardeners cleaning the walks. Jack Frost was *not* a little man with a blue nose who came at night to breathe on the window panes. The dreams of a boy in a warm cot were an affair of the stomach, and there was no such place as Nannie's "Slumberland." Don took refuge behind an obstinate silence from which

no questions could dr[illegible] him, but his education went on none the less, and he could only oppose it with the conscious effort of a make-believe. She laughed at him one day when she found him engaged in a mimic war with his blocks and marbles, and he locked himself and Frankie in the playroom afterward. She was superior Science smiling tolerantly at the simplicity of Faith; he could only blush and flee from her.

However, she said no more to him about his Santa Claus, and Frankie and he, lying in bed in the mornings—with the light from the snow reflected on the ceiling, and the sound of Canadian farm sleds creaking down the road with a jingle of bells—"talked Ch'is'mas" together, and were happy. Don explained an idea he had of how Santa Claus could transport such millions of toys in one sleigh: he loaded the clouds with them, from the top windows of his towering ice palace, and sent them floating down the wind to the cities; then, with his reindeer sleigh that flew in the air, he delivered them from chimney to chimney; and when he had emptied his sacks of one cargo, he drove back to the nearest cloud for another. Frankie, blown about on high with this description, pressed his hands into the sinking sensation that took him in the middle, and gloated, round-eyed; and Don day-dreamed of Christmas in a heart-tickling content.

But, on the eve of the great mystery, his letter and the suspicion that had inspired it recurred to him; he caught the twinkle of a conspiracy in the smiles of the household; his elders repeated too often a strict injunction that when he went to bed he was to close his eyes tightly and go to sleep at once. Why? "Be-

cause, Donald," his mother answered him, kissing him good-night, "if Santa Claus sees you looking at him, he 'll fly away and not leave you anything." He made no reply—being confused with much thought.

Their bed room—Frankie's and his—had been moved to the top of the house to protect the slumbers of the new baby in the nursery. Their playroom had been built for a billiard room, and it was divided from the bedroom by a pair of large folding doors with glasses newly frosted. Don had once licked at that frosting in a mistaken idea that it was the same as the icing of a cake. Finding it tasteless, he had scratched at it with a penknife, and so had made a peephole which he had since used when hiding from Miss Morris.

Now, just as he was falling asleep—(he had explained that phrase "falling asleep" to himself by imagining a physical sensation of falling through the floor with his bed, and so induced sleep by confusing his brain with the whirl and giddiness of his descent.) —Now, when the bed was well through the floor and was beginning to rock gently down to "Slumberland," the thought of this peephole in the frosted door came to him with a vividness of suggestion that might have made it seem, to an older mind, a prompting of the devil. It came with all the terrifying seductiveness, the fear and fascination, of a tempting against conscience. Santa Claus was to be in the playroom, on the other side of the glass doors. Their stockings had been hung there for him, and the peephole was on that side of the room on which he would leave his gifts.

Don started up in his bed, and gazed at the squares

of light that were framed in the doorcase. Frankie had compelled the oblivion of young sleep by a stubborn silence, and now breathed a regular, small breath. There was no sound of any movement in the playroom.

He debated the situation with himself. If Santa Claus should see him watching, he would not leave any gifts; his mother herself had said so. Yes, but behind the frosted glasses how could Santa Claus see him? And yet, why risk it, since an answer to the letter would be enough. Well, if Santa Claus would not allow himself to be seen, would he allow himself to write? And if he objected to being spied on, what would he think of a boy who wrote to him to put him to the proof?

He lay back on his pillows and blinked at the dim ceiling.

He was startled into staring wakefulness—it seemed only an instant later—by the sound of the glass doors being shut with caution. Someone must have looked into the room! It must have been Santa Claus making certain that he was not being watched!

Don clutched the side of his cot, frightened at the danger he had escaped and thankful that he had escaped it; and under both feelings, he was glad beyond words that Santa Claus was "really." He listened, holding his breath with awe.

A box fell in the playroom. The noise was followed by a suppressed giggle. It was Nannie's giggle. And Don had no sooner heard it than he was over the side of his cot and tip-toeing across the room, with the truth already heavy on his chest.

He put his eye to the peephole. When he turned away from the door, he stumbled blindly to his bed and buried his face in the pillows and cried himself to sleep.

YEARS afterward, when experience had discovered to him his own personality, he saw in that small incident the little gist and prologue of his life.

II

IN the gray of the Christmas morning, he woke to his disillusionment; but he woke also to the thought that he must not tell Frankie; and he woke, in fact, no longer an infant, but an elder brother, desperately sophisticated and, beside Frankie's enthusiasm, even blasé. Thereafter, his make-believes were conscious always; and he began to play with his imagination for a game.

Being exiled from the nursery to escape the scarlet fever, he was on a visit to an aunt who lived at the other end of the town; and on an eventful morning, he woke, alone in his cot, to hear his two cousins whispering together within their high spindle palisade on the opposite side of the room. He opened one sleepy eye to see that they were playing "Mammoth Cave," a game which he had taught them. (It required that you cover yourself with the bed clothes, turn flat on your face, and wriggle down through the

suffocation of "between sheets" until your head came out at the foot of the bed.) He did not rouse himself; for the three children had formed an agreement that no one of them should rise before the others, so that if one wished to take an extra forty winks while breakfast waited, they all lay in bed together and the wrath of the powers of the household spent itself in a general thunder that did not strike.

But their restlessness continued; and when he heard a sly chuckle, he asked thickly: "What 're you doing?" The over-prompt "Nothing!" of their answer wakened him. He rose on his elbow. Their wriggling ceased, and their two stolid faces stared blandly at him out of the bed clothes.

One of them said, with a blink: "Who can make the highest cant'lever bridge?" (This was another of his inventions. To do it you stretched yourself out on your back, and then, with your elbows, raised an arch of body supported on neck and heels.) But while the elder cousin was getting himself up, he lifted the corner of his coverlet accidentally, and Don saw the black sleeve of his jacket. He cried "You 're dressing!"

They were already dressed. The playing "cant'-lever bridge" had been a ruse by which they covered an attempt to draw up their knickerbockers to their waists. And all their other contortions had covered similar treasons.

They ran away to breakfast, shouting; and Don almost wept with chagrin and disappointment. It was so low a betrayal of his confidence—so treacher-

ous a misuse of his beloved make-believes—that he felt he never would forgive them. He sulked through a cold breakfast, and went out alone to the lawn, refusing to speak to either of them, though his aunt attempted to placate him with a candy stick.

He took a picture book with him to console himself in solitude; but he found the hired man cutting the grass; and on his neighbor's veranda, a very young lady with a doll was watching the work. Don also watched.

"He—he 's cutting the grass," she explained. "And when he has it all cut, he—he puts water on it to—to make it grow again—so—so he can cut it again."

He accepted the explanation in the spirit in which it was offered; she introduced herself as "Miss Margaret," a title which she had taken from the family servants; and in a few moments he was seated on the front steps beside her, their heads together over the picture book, and each sucking a share of the candy stick. And Miss Margaret's share was the larger.

Between bites, he explained the pictures. When there was a castle in the background, he could tell exactly in what room of it the princess was locked. On demand, he described the ogre, who was her jailer, to the very wart on the knob-end of his nose; and he pictured every article of the gold and silver furnishings of the palace with a realistic detail that made Miss Margaret gasp. Before the book was finished, they had become such friends that she let him

wipe his sticky fingers on her handkerchief. "You have n't remembered yours," she apologized for him.

"Oh," he said, "boys don't ever have them."

She thought the matter over. She said: "You can always borrow mine."

It was so delicately put that with a masculine obtuseness, he did not get her meaning. It was Miss Margaret's surrender.

She was visiting the next door neighbors; and Don and she, during the two weeks that followed their meeting, were together constantly. He deserted his cousins, and she left the youngsters with whom she had been playing. She learned to storm block-forts with battalions of colored marbles that were cavalry at one moment and cannon balls at the next; to make siege guns of cuts of elderberry bush bored of their pith; and to lay out a national cemetery for lead soldiers with dominoes for gravestones. When she came to the game of imprisoned princess, she was already more than a pupil, and she dictated the behavior of the regal beauty in a way which Don could not follow. She insisted that the prince should die of his wounds—after he had killed ten dragons and the ogre—and leave the princess to weep out the eyes of her youth beside his tomb. Don could see no right fun in that, and her contempt was galling. They compromised by agreeing to give the game a tragic ending every third time they played it; and he consented to the substitution of a little china doll for the "Noah's wife," shaped like a blue hourglass, which he had always used as the imprisoned beauty.

Their friendship thickened until he distinguished himself by climbing up the pillar of a side veranda to call "good morning" through the window to her while she was still in bed; and she, at dinner, refused to eat stewed corn, a dish of which she was ravenously fond, because he had told her that it had once made him ill. She was a most unusual young lady, especially in affairs of the heart: she was impulsively positive in her likes and her dislikes, and she expressed either always unreservedly. She treated Don's elder cousin, Conroy, with a coldness which the boy demanded an explanation of: and she explained simply "I don't like your face." She crossed the veranda to a visitor—to whom she had not been introduced—and sat herself on his knee, smiling the frankest admiration; and when she was asked to excuse her abruptness, she replied "He's nice." She flattered Don with an adoration that went to his head.

She had already given him a handkerchief worked with her monogram in pale blue silk—for his sticky fingers, though she did not say so—and she came one afternoon to their playroom in the broken "summer house" with a photograph of herself in her winter furs. He was busy making preparations for the burial of a lead hero who had been killed in the wars. He accepted the picture with a brief condescension and directed her to line up, in funeral procession, the wooden animals from his Noah's ark. She obeyed him silently, but not with her usual enthusiasm; and when the last strain of martial music had died away,

and Don had fired the last "Boom" of imaginary cannon over the soldier's grave, she said abruptly: "You ought to give me one."

"One what?"

"Picture. A picture of yourself."

He shook his head. "Have n't any." He was erecting a tomb of building-blocks over the grave. She watched him moodily. When he came to put on the roof, he found himself in difficulties; he had no blocks long enough to reach from wall to wall. He looked around him for a substitute and saw her photograph. He tried it; it could be made to fit exactly if the back wall were moved in an inch—

She snatched it from him. "No!"

He caught at it. "Give me that."

She shook her head, her doll's eyes big with indignation. "No!"

"I want it," he said angrily.

"No." She backed away from him. "No. You sha' n't. *No!*" She stamped her foot to stop him as he got up from his knees. When he clutched at her arm, impatiently, she turned and ran, screaming "You sha' n't! You sha' n't!"

Well, there were other building materials as good as her old photograph. There was the cover of the tin box in which he kept his marbles. He tried it, and broke down a side of his mausoleum. He brushed the ruins away and began a towering monument of solid blocks.

But Miss Margaret did not come back, and he began to miss her. He went nonchalantly around the

house to where the other children were playing "fire engine"; but she was not there. He inquired next door, from the maid-of-all-work; and she told him that Miss Margaret's mother had arrived and taken her down town.

Even then he did not suspect what was in store for him. He thought to make all right by finding a picture of himself to give her; and the only picture that he had was one of his Sunday school—in which he stood in the front row of a group of little girls. He wrapped it up complacently in a newspaper and left it with the servant for her.

He learned, next morning, that she had gone away to her home. He learned also that she had not liked the photograph; the servant returned it to him in small pieces—pieces which she had swept out from behind a bureau when she was cleaning the guest chamber. He gathered from his aunt that Miss Margaret had been jealous of the twenty-odd little girls who were in the picture with him. She had left him without even saying good-bye.

III

Don went back to his play somewhat lonely (for a day or two) but with no sentimental regrets. With the selfishness of his years, he forgot her in the excitement of returning to his home to find Frankie shorn of his locks and promoted to knickerbockers.

(Afterward, whenever he saw a boy in kilts, he thought the youngster wore them because he had not yet had the scarlet fever.) He did not recover Miss Margaret again until—the 24th of May.

These were the days when the 24th of May, "the Queen's Birthday," was a festival for all loyal Canadians. And they were the days before the invention of the giant cracker and the toy revolver. As yet only the "cannon"—that first improvement on the Chinese cracker—was in the toy-shop windows; and although Don had bought five of them (believing in weight of metal as against rapidity of fire) Frankie had bought only crackers of smaller calibre. It remained to be seen whether his rattling volleys would be a match for Don's great guns.

They had been forbidden to begin their celebration until after breakfast, and they raced through the meal neck and neck. They finished together and ran upstairs together; but Don stumbled and fell on the landing, and Frankie reached the toy closet first. There the crackers, Roman candles, pin-wheels and what not, were laid out on the floor in two long rows, in fond imitation of ordnance in an arsenal; and Frankie began to cram his purchases in his pockets as fast as as he could pick them up. Don shoved in beside him, panting, to see that his brother was taking two cannon crackers which he did not own; and Don, as the rightful owner of them, snatched at them, to hold them till he could get breath to protest. He caught them by their long fuses; and Frankie, jerking back, plucked the strings out by the roots.

Now Frankie was a sturdy little fellow—round-headed and bent-browed—and he had learned that he could domineer over his milder brother by flying into a childish passion whenever he was crossed. He struck at Don, at once; but Don, enraged by the loss of his two best crackers, closed with him; and in a wild interchange of buffets, Frankie took a blow on the face that sent him to the floor howling with a bleeding nose.

Don, stiff and white with fright, was still standing in the door of the closet, looking as guilty as Cain, with Frankie yelling on the carpet at his feet, when their father—home for the holiday—flung angrily into the room. He took in the situation with one furious glance; and then, without waiting for any explanation, seized Don by the collar and began cuffing him with a brutally hard hand.

No doubt he did not know how heavily he struck the boy, for he had never beaten any of his children before—being able to awe them with the mere threat of his voice—and Don was too stunned to cry out. As soon as he was released, he staggered back against the wall, his head ringing, the breath all out of his body, blinded with tears. His father, taking Frankie up, carried him, still bawling, out of the room.

It was Don's first experience of these passionate griefs of childhood—griefs that rend the body with terrible convulsions, griefs that seem to rend the very soul of the child with the pain of an injustice from which there is no appeal. It was his first experience of them, and he threw himself on the floor of the

toy closet like a child in a fit. He flung the firecrackers away from him; he beat the floor with his little fists; he ran to the door of the playroom, locked it, and dropped on the rug there choked with the sobs that burst from him, in writhing and weeping, till he was too weak to do more than moan.

Nannie came, and tapped secretly on the door, and cried "Donnie? Donnie?" under her breath. But he knew from her tone that he was in disgrace with the household, and he would not open to her.

"They 're goin' on the picnic," she whispered hoarsely.

He knew they were; and he knew that his father would punish him by leaving him at home. He did not intend to go downstairs and take his sentence. He held quiet until Nannie had gone away, and then he crawled, numb and exhausted, into the bedroom and threw himself on his cot.

He heard knocking on his door faintly, in a weak doze, but he did not get up. He heard his mother calling him, up the stairs which she was unable to climb; but he did not reply. Only when he heard voices on the lawn, he peeped out behind the curtain and saw her in her invalid chair, his father wheeling her—with the baby on his arm—and Frankie walking proudly at her side. They turned at the gate to call a last good-bye to Nannie; and his mother looked up at the nursery windows with a face that often came with tears, to Donald, afterward, in dreams.

He jumped back and dropped the curtain. When

he heard Nannie close the front door, he looked out again. They were gone.

There were no more tears in him. He went back to the playroom, dumbly, and sat down among his toys. The sight of the fire-crackers gave him a sickening feeling. He began to set up his soldiery as mechanically as an older person would turn from grief to an accustomed task.

But weeping had made him hungry, and he deserted his wars to look out a side window at the neighboring fire-hall clock. Then, from the window, he went to a wall of colored pictures which Frankie and he had cut from the "Christmas Graphic" and pinned up on the plaster; and, at last, he began to wander from picture to picture, "playing showman" as Frankie and he had done.

He was before a picture of Nelson at Trafalgar, glowing with an imagined eloquence which did not shape itself in words at all, and swaying a huge public with emotion—(let his father beat him then)—when suddenly he saw Miss Margaret sitting in the front row of his audience.

The audience vanished. Don had found for himself that strange companion of so many solitary children, an imaginary playmate.

He made a round of the pictures with her, played Imprisoned Princess and the Game of War, and took her on a tour of the empty house. He showed her the post in the attic where he mailed his letters to Santa Claus, and he assured her that Santa Claus never failed to answer them. He took her to his

mother's room and let her tumble in the prohibited feather bed. He explored behind the big green sofa in the sitting-room, and took down all the forbidden books in his father's library to show them to her.

Nannie found him there, and summoned him to luncheon; and Miss Margaret ate beside him in an imaginary chair from a wonderful blue bowl, long since broken, which he had once had for bread and milk. He sat in such a thoughtful silence and was so unresponsive to all Nannie's kind attempts to console him, that she lost patience and accused him of sulking. He ignored her temper, so that Miss Margaret might not be disturbed by it. When they had finished their meal, he started the musical box for her, and teased the parrot in the sun of the window till "Polly" squawked and screeched and bit at the bars of the cage; and Nannie scolded them out of the room, and they raced upstairs together.

They came down with all the fire-crackers and with a lead soldier in a match box, whom they buried deep in the garden, crooning "Nearer My God To Thee" with no sense of irreverence. They split all Don's elderberry guns firing funeral salvos of crackers from them; and they blew up a fort with a "cannon" cracker and annihilated a whole regiment of men. No one came to disturb them until they began to set off pin wheels and Roman candles in mid-afternoon; then Nannie interfered, and they ran into the house laughing rebelliously, and shut themselves in the playroom again.

"Well," Nannie complained to the cook, "his lickin' ain't done *him* any good."

When the family returned, he was cutting out figures from the "Graphic" supplements and acting new and wonderful games. He did not go downstairs; Frankie came up—full of the news of the picnic and the steamboat trip down the river and the glories of the merry-go-round—prepared, perhaps, to gloat over the fallen estate of his brother. Don did not even notice him. Frankie insisted on being heard. Don gathered up his pictures and barricaded himself in the bedroom.

He remained there until he was called to supper.

"You have been a bad boy, Don," his mother said to him that night. "Your father 's angry with you."

He would not look at her. His face was still swollen from his morning's tears, and streaked with dirt, and smudged with powder. His fingers were scorched. There was a hole burned in the sleeve of his jacket.

"What have you been doing?"

"Playing."

"Are n't you sorry?"

He did not answer.

"Say that you 're sorry, or I shall not kiss you good-night."

He did not feel that he was sorry, and he did not speak. She smoothed his hair with her thin hand, kissed him and sent him away.

"I don't seem to understand him any more," she confessed to his father with a sigh.

His father replied: "He 's growing too big to be running around here, wild. He should be at school."

And that was the decree of judgment which was

to end Don's childhood. He was left to his imaginary Miss Margaret and his other make-believes through all that long, radiant summer; but in the fall, Miss Morris opened a "private and select" academy for boys and girls, and Don was enrolled as her second pupil.

Her first had been little Mary Morris, her small sister.

IV

BETWEEN the ages of eight years and of eighteen, there seems to be a period in which the individuality of the schoolboy does not develop. The originality of the child has been overgrown; the eccentricities of the young man have not yet sprouted. Don, seated at a desk that was exactly like a score of other desks in Miss Morris's schoolroom, studied the common lessons from the prescribed books; and what he learned, he learned like a parrot. Seated at home, beside the "study" table in the playroom, he worked out his exercises mechanically with Frankie, or idly scorched the wood of his lead pencils over the flame of the lamp. He learned to play the games which his schoolmates played, to fight as they fought, to believe what they believed, to act as they acted. His mind no longer grew of its own strength, in its own inclination; it was forced in a hothouse bed, and trained to a set figure.

He was perhaps a trifle more timorous and retiring than most of his classmates, slower to fight, slower to learn, and more given to what Miss Morris called "dazing" over his books; but in all the broad characteristics of his age, he was commonplace and typical. Even in the playground he did nothing to mark himself out among his fellows—except to the eyes of little Mary Morris, whose admiration was so silent that he remained unaware of it. Once he attempted to take an impossibly high jump, went at it in a smiling assurance, and fell over it with amazement. (He explained, then, bruised and tearful, that he had dreamed, the previous night, of jumping the six-foot fence at the back of the yard, and had leaped over it with ease and grace.) Ordinarily, he lacked the desire to shine. He lacked it notably in comparison with Frankie; but then Frankie was growing to be the sort of boy who will not let you pass him on the street—even though he has to run to keep ahead of you—and who sleeps always on his side, with a leg drawn up, in an attitude of climbing caught from the schoolbook illustration of Longfellow's "Excelsior."

At the age of nine, Don was a weedy boy, slope-shouldered, loose-wristed, pale and very shy. He was not strong enough in the arm to enjoy baseball; and he was too weak in the calves to relish "Pump, pump, pull away" or "Hounds and Deer"; and for that reason, he did not join in half the games of the yard and the pavement. He spent his idle hours reading stories of Indians, English boarding-school boys and

midshipmen; and on Sundays he gave himself with a precocious devoutness to church and Sabbath school. He had been impressed with the teaching that the Deity is omnipresent; and in his solitary moments he was almost physically conscious of the awful presence of the Spirit. It was a feeling which he kept as secret as a sin; but it came to possess him with a sense of companionship. He even played with it imaginatively, half expecting visions and praying in a childish ecstasy; and in the public park near his home, there was a thick clump of bushes in which he used to build little fires of chips and leaves to burn wooden animals from his ark as Hebraic offerings.

Among the pupils of Miss Morris's school was Don's elder cousin Conroy—the boy whose face Miss Margaret had not liked; and between Don and him there had always been a boyish ill-will that grew into a noticeable enmity as Don became more of a long-legged weakling and Conroy more of a pug-nosed and sturdy bully. The tie of their relationship, added to Don's plain inferiority in physical strength, kept them from any set fights, but Conroy played rough tricks on his cousin, tripped him slyly in the classroom, shouldered him from the sidewalk into the gutter, filled his cap with snow and laughingly pelted and persecuted him in the playground and on the street. At the same time, he would not let anyone else take the same liberties; and he fought more than one of the boys who—in the expressive idiom of the schoolyard—"picked on" Don. Conroy plodded through his studies as slowly as Don sauntered; and

they moved along together at the foot of their classes in an enforced companionship that was contemptuously kindly on Conroy's side and at once grateful and resentful on Don's.

Then one day the cousin came to school with the whole story of Don's flirtation with Miss Margaret—a story he had learned from the dinner-table talk of his elders on the previous evening. It was now three years since she had passed out of their lives, but Conroy still remembered her aversion to his "face" and her whole-hearted admiration of Don; and to the older point of view which he had newly caught, Don's whole affair had been a ridiculous childishness that had ended in the still more ridiculous fiasco of the torn photograph and Miss Margaret's indifferent departure.

It was shameful to Don when it was brought up to him again, and he blushed and suffered bashfully under his cousin's public teasing. "Did she use to kiss you in the summerhouse?" the others twitted him. "Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie," they called him. "Go and play with the girls and give them your photograph."

He silenced some of the younger ones by boxing their ears; he was even irritated into fighting a boy of his own height, and was only saved from a beating by Conroy's interference. But the cousin kept up his own teasing, day after day; and when Saturday came, Don went out alone to his haunts in the Park, almost a persecuted refugee from the small society of the neighborhood.

It was a clear June morning, with a breeze that

rustled in the driveway maples and a sunlight that lay dazzingly white on the gravel walks; and Don looked about him with an easing sense of freedom, drawing a refreshingly deep breath. He had not yet learned to be sentimental about nature; he had merely an animal pleasure in the escape to the open where his eyes could stretch their book-cramped muscles in long sight, and he could walk free from the critical observation of his elders and talk shamelessly to himself.

He was heading for the wilder upper portion of the Park—where there were no flower beds, and the ground had not been levelled, and the grass was uncut—when he saw the distant figure of a boy coming after him across the lower lawns; and he immediately dodged behind a bed of lilac bushes bordered with geraniums and striped ribbon grass. It was a large bed, in the shape of a great crescent; and Don skirted it, under cover—crouching in the accepted manner of an Indian scout—and peeped around the far tip of the crescent to see his cousin Conroy coming up on his trail. He knew it was against the law to enter one of these hoed beds of bushes; but, seeing no other escape, he ran back and leaped over the geraniums and crawled in among the lilacs on his hands and knees.

He lay down in a little open patch of ground in the center of the bed and listened breathlessly for the footsteps of his pursuer. After a long time, he heard Conroy calling him at a distance up the Park. He rose cautiously to his knees, took off his little Scotch

cap, and began to repeat his usual prayers in peace. And then, to make his devotions more real, he gathered some broken branches and small twigs, drove the straighter ones into the soft earth and put the others across them in a crude representation of an altar.

The story of that make-believe cannot be followed farther without an appearance of sacrilege; but Don's memory was full of Old Testament stories of Jehovah's interference in aid of his prophets; he had not yet learned that the age of miracles had ceased; and when he came out of the bushes again, he walked like a young David to battle, his eyes big with a religious exaltation.

Conroy had been seeking him up and down the Park, hiding and watching, without ever suspecting that his timid cousin had dared to enter one of the forbidden clumps of bushes; and as soon as he saw Don in the open, he raised a view-haloo and bore down on him. Don doubled up his fists and waited. Conroy came shouting gleefully. He did not intend to tease again; he had seen Don going off alone into the Park, and he had been taken with remorse for his persecution. In the bottom of his boy's heart, he admired his quiet relative, though by a common boyish perversion of affection he could never keep his rough hands off Don, trying to plague him out of a superior indifference that was the more irritating because it was so unconscious.

As he came nearer, he saw Don's attitude and stopped. "What 's the matter?"

"Keep away from me."

The boy stared. "What 's the matter?"

Don backed up against the geraniums. "Keep away from me."

Conroy raised a derisive shout. "Do you want to *fight*?"

The young David swallowed slowly and shut his teeth on the pale-lipped mutter of a prayer. His cousin crept in on him, grinning, and crouched—intending to wrestle him and roll him on the grass—playfully. Don caught him in the mouth with a blow that knocked him off his balance. He jumped to his feet, white; and Don was waiting for him.

They fought in a boyish fury, wrestling, kicking and scratching; Don even bit his cousin's hand. He was whimpering hysterically; half his blows were going wide; and Conroy struck at his head and face and kicked into his legs. He went down on the grass, but before Conroy could more than pant out "Had enough?" he was up again, fighting like mad; and the more Conroy punished him, the harder he fought, whining like an animal, his face covered with blood. He did not feel the blows that blinded him; and his endurance was so unexpected, and his despairing stubbornness so wild, that it frightened Conroy, and he, too, began to cry.

He tried to dodge Don's onslaughts, but the boy flung himself in, clutching and falling, and tearing as he fell; and Conroy had to defend himself with the most frantically brutal blows. Even then, sobbing horribly and so weak he could scarcely stand, Don staggered in again and again after every rebuff; and

when he fell at last, he still struggled, fighting despairingly, with the grass.

Conroy, trembling in the knees, sat down at a little distance, wiped his blubbered face and picked at his torn stockings where the kick of Don's heavy shoes had cut them and drawn blood. He looked at Don with scared eyes. "God! God!" Don screamed suddenly, and rising to his hands and knees, he began to crawl toward Conroy, in a frenzy. Conroy jumped to his feet and ran; and as he looked back over his shoulder, he saw Donald, in trying to follow him, topple and fall on his face.

He did not stop running till he came to the Park fountain. There, having washed his face and hands, he sat down shivering with guilty horror, as bewildered as a murderer, unable to make up his mind what to do. He was afraid to go home and leave Don there. He was afraid to go back and face the prospect of more fighting. He had "had enough."

It was fifteen minutes before he got himself around the bed of lilac bushes and saw Don lying motionless where he had fallen.

"Don!" he called fearfully. "Don! What 's the matter? . . . I did n't mean to. I did n't want to fight . . . Don?" He came closer. "I 'm not going to touch you. I—you hurt me as much as I did you. . . . Don? Get up."

Don began to moan. Conroy drew nearer. "You were n't licked," he consoled, in a shameful whisper. "You were n't licked. . . I ran away."

Don sobbed: "It—it is n't that. It is n't that."

Conroy knelt beside him and began to wipe his cousin's torn fingers in his wet handkerchief. "I 'll never h—hit you"— He choked.

Don, face down, rolled his head from side to side. It was n't *that*. He could n't tell what it was.

It was that his God had suddenly withdrawn into the high heavens and left him; that He had shown Himself not a God of personal mercy and protection, but of distant justice and no partiality of love.

"Come on back, Don," Conroy whispered. "I won't tease you any more. And I won't ever let anyone else."

It was the end of Don's young religiosity, and it was the beginning of a mutual respect and friendship between Conroy and him. Don was incurably solitary in his inclinations, but it became a solitude of two; for Conroy developed a sort of protective devotion that was as dumb as it was dogged. If Don did not come out to join in the games of the other boys, Conroy hunted him down among his books and sat with him over them. If Don stole away into the Park, Conroy followed him up like a young "Man Friday." They played Robinson Crusoe together, and fought Indians in the Park woods, and went on wonderful exploring expeditions in those narrow wilds. Don had a very robust and buoyant spirit that charmed his cousin; and if he had any tendency to morbidness or melancholy, the companionship kept it down.

They worked together at their lessons whenever they could. If there were any fights to be fought, they

took them together; and for that reason there were few. They left Miss Morris's academy at the same time, and entered an upper class of the Public School where they sat side by side—until their teachers separated them for reasons of discipline. And though there was no girlish sentimentality in their friendship, they were David and Jonathan for years.

Their gradual separation began in the High School "forms," because Don's father—being a lawyer—wished him to study classics in preparation for the University and the profession of law, and Conroy's father, a wealthy wholesaler, made him take the "commercial course" in preparation for a business career. They were then fifteen years of age and sixteen, Conroy being the older; and as yet in the great drama of life that was being played around them, they had taken no part. Don's mother was an invalid, and her little daughter Mary had first claim on her affection; his father was a busy man; and Frankie had companions of his own age. When Don was not with Conroy, he was alone with his dog.

But Conroy had a family of brothers and sisters, and a mother and a father who liked to keep their children together in the house. Don was shy with them, and he had an awkwardness of temperament that prevented him from joining heartily in the little parties of young folk that were so common in his uncle's home. His solitary walks with "Dexter" became more frequent—when the pressure of Frankie's rivalry in his studies did not keep him home; for Frankie had left Miss Morris's Select Academy with

a five-pointed gold medal inscribed "Awarded to Francis Grayson Gregg for Good Conduct, Punctuality and Progress"; he had entered the High School at the head of his year; and he had closed up on Don so nearly that if the elder brother ever tripped on an examination, now, the younger would surely draw up even with him.

"You 're wasting too much time reading trash," their father said to Don, one night when he found the boy on a chair before his mother's bookshelves.

"I 've finished my lessons, sir," Don pleaded.

"What 's that you 're taking?"

It was a copy of Reade's "Put Yourself in His Place." Mr. Gregg drew down his shaggy eyebrows at it. "Put it back," he ordered. "That 's no book for a boy. It 's no book for anyone. Silly trash! Why don't you read something to improve your mind?" It irritated him to find in Don the same sentimental appetite for novels which his unpractical wife had always had. Frankie had none of it. *He* had inherited his father's brains.

Don put up the book reluctantly and turned to the door. "And you might as well understand now," his father said, "that I can't send you both to the University. And if Frankie proves himself . . .better fitted to profit by it, there 'll be no favoritism shown . . . in the matter . . . Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," Don said, backing out.

His father opened his newspaper with the satisfaction of having performed his parental duties with a stern impartiality; and Don went back rebelliously

to a copy of Spenser's "Faerie Queene" which he had begun to read because he had thought it might be a fairy tale. He had never lost his love of fairy tales.

V

THE "Pass Matriculation and Third Certificate Class," of which Don was a member, had now entered on the Spring term that was to end in the dreaded government examination for admission to the Provincial University; and Don was working like a slave. Even his Saturdays he gave up to study, and took his walks with a text-book in his pocket, and drew the figures of his geometrical "deductions" with a twig in the earth. He went much further afield than he had in the days when Conroy and he had hunted man-eating tigers in the Park. He had found a ravine, to the north of the town, lying wooded between two bald-top hills that had been sheared for farm land; the sides of the ravine had been left uncut; and in the bottom of it, under the shelter of firs and spruces, a little cool stream ran between its shores of brown pine needles and dead leaves. Here, he read and dreamed and studied, in a happy solitude with his dog, under innumerable green pine branches, among the corded roots of clinging firs, beside the crisp tinkle of little bubbled waterfalls.

Conroy knew the place, but he did not often come with Don—except on a Sunday afternoon when there

were no football games to play and his home was depressingly Sabbatical. And this was a Saturday, and Don did not expect to be disturbed. He had made himself comfortable on a little knoll of grass, with the stream at his feet and the slim white stem of a silver birch at his back; Dexter had curled himself in a patch of sunlight near by, his nose between his paws, blinking sleepily; some wood sparrows twittered and quarreled among the evergreens.

Don, with a book of the Odyssey on his knees and a "crib" in his hand, fitted the translation to the text and marked with a lead pencil the words he did not know. He was so busy that he did not notice Dexter when the dog pricked up its ears. He was murmuring: "Then answering him—then answering him—the wily Odysseus—the wily Odysseus—said 'King Alcinous' "—The dog sat up, its nostrils twitching, and watched the trail of brown path down which they had come. " 'Truly it is a beautiful thing'—Quiet, sir." The dog had growled. "What 's the matter with you?" He looked up from his study. There was a girl approaching through the trees.

He put his cap on quickly, and fixed his attention on his book in a pretence of absorption which he intended to maintain until she had passed. But, in a moment, out of the corner of his eye, he saw her stop; and Dexter, having sniffed at the hem of her skirt—which came almost to her shoe-tops—barked and ran away up the path. She came closer, and stood there. He raised his eyes from her ankles—which were neatly turned—to her belt, in which she carried a bunch of violets—and then to a face that was dimly

familiar, brown-eyed, flushed, and greeting him with a friendly smile that waited to be remembered. She stood in the sunlight, her hands clasped behind her, her eyes dark in the shadow of the brim of her hat, her teeth white in the light; and the adorable dimple in either cheek deepened when she saw that he did not recognize her.

She laughed. A blind memory groped and moved in his brain, and a rush of blood flamed over his face. The dog was barking among the trees. She turned and called in that direction: "He does n't remember me!"

He knew then. It was "Miss Margaret!"

He started to get up, catching at his books as they slipped from his knees, and fumbling for his pocket as he tried to put away his lead-pencil. Remember her? The realization that this smiling young woman was his "Miss Margaret" had come on him with such a shock that he did not know what he was about. In a sort of bewildered double-consciousness, he watched his hands trying to pick up the scattered volumes. Miss Margaret! And then he came suddenly into clear possession of his senses, and stood up with a tremulous smile, a book in one hand and his pencil in the other. "Yes, I do," he said huskily. "You 're Miss Margaret."

"How did you know?" she cried, beaming on him. "By the photograph? Have I changed?"

The excitement in her eyes was catching. He stammered, with a broken laugh: "N—no. You took it away—the photograph. I have n't any."

"Oh yes!" she recollected. "I thought. . . But

why did I?" she accused him. "You tried to—"

"Well," he dared. "What did *you* do to mine? You tore it up—and *threw* it away."

"I did n't! Oh!" She was scarlet. "How did you find out?" The dog came barking and jumping about her, with Conroy stumbling over him. "He did n't remember!" she cried. "How did you know? . . . He has n't changed a bit. . . Is n't it funny; he called me 'Miss Margaret'!"

They all talked together, raising their voices to drown Dexter's yelping. "It was my plan. I wanted to surprise you." "I told her we'd find you here." "I almost called for Con on my way out, too." "Is n't it fun!" "Quiet, sir!" "Just look at him!" "Down, sir!"

Conroy caught the dog and muzzled it with a hand; they heard the shrill treble of their voices, unsupported by its barking; and they stopped, self-conscious. The excitement ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

Don looked from Conroy to her with a quick change to bashfulness that took him in the middle of a smile and froze it. She was "Miss Margaret"—and she was not. "I did n't know any *other* name," he apologized. "I—"

"Did n't you? Did n't I ever tell you?"

"No. You—"

"Richardson."

Miss Richardson. It made her a stranger to him. He felt almost as if they needed an introduction. "You knew mine?"

"Your cousin told me." They both looked at Conroy, and were unable to get their eyes back to each other again. Conroy saw the situation and busied himself with the dog, snapping his fingers at it, and catching at its ears. They struggled with an abashed silence until Conroy—thinking loyally that they would get along better without him—said: "Well, I promised to be back home right away. . . I guess I better be going." And in spite of their confused efforts to keep him, he did succeed, with the aid of Dexter, in getting himself off the scene.

She looked around her. "What a beautiful place!"

He replied, lamely: "Yes, is n't it."

She saw his books. "Were you studying?"

He tried to think of something more to say than the bald affirmative, and ended by faltering "N—no."

She stooped down to the Odyssey. "Is n't it funny? What is it?"

"Greek."

"Really?" She sat down on the grass. "Is it—is it as interesting as the book you—"

He caught the picture that was in her mind—the picture of the two of them with their heads together over the fairy tales, on his aunt's porch steps—and he laughed. "No—not *quite*!"

"What is it like? What is it all about?"

He came down slowly, on one knee beside her. "It 's—I can't read it without a trans—but it 's a good deal of a fairy tale too."

"And there are n't any pictures." She turned over the pages, careful not to look at him for fear

she should make him shy again. "It 's like the first time I saw music—printed music. I wondered how anyone could make . . . music out of it. I suppose it 's easy enough—when you know how—too—Greek."

Don laughed apologetically as he sat down. "I don't know. I don't know *how*."

"We don't study it—at Horton. German is bad enough."

"Are you studying German?"

Oh, she was not studying much of anything—except music and singing. And she had worked so hard at those that her health had broken down and her mother had taken her away from the school. They were in town for a month, on their way to the Muskoka lakes where they were to spend the summer.

She chattered nervously about herself, turning the pages backward and forward. Don watched her fingers. He glanced shyly at the soft profile of her cheek and chin, with the dark eyelash and the dimple that came and went with her smile. He breathed a faint, warm odor of violets that overbore the scent of the wood balsam, every now and then, with a sweet suggestion of feminine daintiness and charm. And that perfume stealing in on him, and her white hands touching his old book, and her voice voluble in friendship, and her smile—they dazzled, fascinated him, intoxicated him, so that his eyes burned on her, and he leaned forward beside her, clasping his knees, to see her better under the brim of her hat; and she looked up, half-startled, and caught the boyish gentleness and reverence that shone even through his ardor; and she was not afraid.

She told him of her studies in the boarding-school for girls, in which she was a day scholar; and he described his own class-room life. They talked as eagerly, and listened as hungrily, as if the trivial experiences of their small days were great and moving events. "I often wondered what you were doing," she confessed. "There was a boy at home reminded me of you—a little."

Don was afraid to acknowledge that he had made an imaginary playmate of her; indeed, he remembered it only dimly. "I did n't think I 'd ever see you again," he said. "I did n't know where you 'd gone." The miracle of her return came strong on him.

"You did n't forget me, though," she said.

"No."

"Your cousin told me—how they teased you—about the photograph."

He laughed with a return of the shame which that teasing had taught him to feel in remembering the incident. "We had an awful fight," he recollected.

"You are good friends, now."

"Yes."

"He hurried me right out here, as soon as he knew who I was." She smiled at the thought of Conroy's delighted eagerness to have her meet Don again. Then she leaned back against the birch, and gazed happily at the tangle of sunlit green branches and the bare, brown shadows underneath. It was just such a place as she would have expected to find the little boy whom she remembered. And he was the same boy, though evidently his books had taken the place of his make-believes, and he was more reserved.

She liked him, and she knew it. On her way out with Conroy, she had been wondering whether she *would* like him. She was glad that she did.

As for Don, he had no feminine introspection, and his happiness held him in a dazed silence. He was conscious only that a young divinity—for she was already more than a girl to him—had come glowing and beautiful out of dreamland, and sat beside him in an odor of violets, and talked to him with a musical, soft voice.

"The water sounds so pretty," she said.

He replied, musingly: "I 'd change it for you, if it did n't."

"Why! How?"

"It 's the stream running over some big stones. You can change the sound—by changing the stones."

"Really?"

"Would you like to?"

"Why, of *course*!"

The tiny waterfall was just below their knoll, at the end of a bright shallow where three boulders held back the bed of the stream and dropped the current brawling over their shoulders into a dark pool. Don helped her down the steep bank to the water's edge; and with much excitement and more laughter, with little cries of delight from her and a furious barking from Dexter, they loosened stones from the bank and put them where the plangent water would strike and curl about them; and with every stone, sure enough, they got a new note.

Then they followed down the changes of the stream

to a green slope where, Don knew, the first violets always budded; and when he found only leaves and no blossoms yet—for, of course, it was too early in the year—she took some of the hot-house flowers from her belt, made holes in the ground with the pin of her brooch, and stuck the stems in, playfully. "There!" she said. "Now, you pick them."

He took them out again, one by one, careful not to break the delicate stalks, and held them out to her, laughing.

"Oh, thank you." She accepted them with a sparkling gravity. "Are n't they sweet! May I have them all? Would n't you like to keep some?"

Don stammered: "Ye—e—es."

"Have you a pin? No, I 'll put them in your buttonhole."

He could not look at her face; he kept his eyes on her frail wrists as she reached to the lapel of his coat and put the violets in the buttonhole and patted them into place. When she stood back, a little flushed at her own daring, he raised his eyes to hers; and the look that passed between them was as innocent as affection and as tender as a caress.

Hours later, they came loitering down the avenue towards home; and they came so slowly that Dexter—running ahead of them impatiently, waiting, and then running back—covered every foot of the way again and again. They were still talking, but with an easy friendliness now, and with a confident meeting of their glances. The sun, low in the west behind them, slanted its long rays on them in a glory as they came. The

early April breeze, soft with its first evening mist, stirred the budding chestnut branches over their heads, with the breath of a sigh. A robin, as fat as a pullet, called to them from a green lawn, as they passed, a throaty promise of Spring.

VI

Don had scarcely more than outgrown knickerbockers; his habit of solitude had kept him as clean-minded as the girl herself; and if it was love that had taken him, it was a love that desired only to look at her and listen to her when she was with him, and to dream of her and wish for her when she was away. It was a boy's love that had no burning, a present happiness that had no doubt of the future and no guilt of the past. But it filled his thoughts with pictures of her that came between him and the pages of his books; and he ran from school hours to her like a child to play.

He came to the house for her quite openly, until she noticed some of his school-fellows grinning at him across the street as he walked with her, and she understood that they would tease him, as they had about the photograph. After that, she agreed to meet him at the top of the Park, on the road to their ravine. She did not let him come out to her of an evening, because she had heard his aunt say that he must not neglect his studies; and she made him bring his books

with him when they went on their walks. She even encouraged him to work, by making him read his translation aloud to her and by pretending to be interested with him in the solution of his "deductions." And as long as he was with her, he *could* work. It was when he was at his desk in school, or shut up in his room at home, that she kept him idle, his eyes set on the memory of her, and his book forgotten in his hand.

Conroy accompanied them sometimes, but not often. He could be with her of an evening, when Don could not; and though there was no rivalry between them, he knew that Don would not wish to share her, and boyishly he held aloof. They went alone to their green alcoves and grassed recesses, like a pair of lovers in a poem, but with a childish spirit. There were blue-birds to wonder at, the first hepaticas to find, a water-rat for Dexter to go mad about, and the lurking violets, at last, in a sudden, shy profusion. Don broke off the odorous branches of firs and hemlocks to make a dry seat for her, one day after it had rained; and then he backed the seat with a screen of foliage and made her a rough bower. As the weather grew warmer, she felt less like romping along the stream, and they sat oftener in this arbor; and while she listened dreamily, with her head against his arm, he read aloud from his Spenser's "Faerie Queene." Many of the lines were printed in asterisks, because—Don explained—the manuscript had been old and torn, he supposed. But there was much there of knights "yclad in mighty arms" who rode through the woods

of Faery to slay monsters and rescue maids; and if she sometimes objected that this was not study, Don was able to assure her that Spenser was on his "English course"; and if, while he read, he was the Redcross Knight and she Una "on her palfrey slow," he did not tell her, and she did not guess.

It was all very innocent and friendly—though Don had some bewildering moments when his heart seemed to swell with a choked longing in his chest. Then, two days of wind and rain kept her in the house, where he could only speak with her under conditions of strained formality—for he was at the age when the usages of indoors are an oppression on the spirits—and their return to their haunts gave him the feeling for her which a bright-colored toy had used to raise in him, a desire to fondle it and rub it against his cheek. When they sat to rest on a great pine—one that had been brought down by the wind in its branches and the rain in its roots—he put his arm around her to support her; she was tired. He spread her hand on his knee and compared his own brown and ink-stained fingers with hers that were dimpled at the knuckles and pink in the nails; and some older instinct woke in him, and he lifted her hand and kissed it. She answered the caress with a little pressure, and smiled absent-mindedly, a far-away look in her eyes.

"What 'll you do when I go away?" she asked.

His heart was stifling him. "I don't know. Are you going away?"

"Mother says I must. She says I don't look well."

He drew her closer, and when she turned, their eyes melted together in a look. His face drooped to hers. "No," she whispered. "Don't . . . please, Don. I promised mother. She said it was n't right."

He released her, his lips trembling, and turned away. In a moment, she put a hand out and touched his arm. "Read me something, Don," she said.

And neither of them understood what had happened.

THEY did not understand even when they came to say their last good-byes, on the night before her departure. It was a Sunday; she was to go in the early morning; and all her friends and her mother's had called to spend the evening. Don sat in an awkward silence, without being able to find a word to say; she followed him to the porch when he went out. They shook hands, like their elders. "Well, good-bye," he said.

"*Good*-bye."

He waited. "You 'll be back?"

"Yes," she promised. "I 'll be back."

"I 'll wait for you." He put on his cap, and hesitated. "Will you write to me?"

"Oh yes! I 'll write—often."

He went down a step. "All right," he said bravely. When he reached the path, he added "Good-bye."

She watched him out to the gate. He turned there; and she, standing in the light of the door, waved her hand and called "Good-bye."

They parted, as young people do, hopefully. The future, they thought, was all theirs to meet again in.

He woke, next morning, with a start, and lay blinking at the warm May morning that shone in his window. What—what was it that had happened? Miss Margaret! She had—He groped under his pillow for his watch; it was eight o'clock. She had gone. Miss Margaret had gone.

The light suddenly looked hard and cold, framed in the sash, like a prison window. His face went blank. The day held no promise. He lay back on his pillow and stared at the ceiling.

It is not in action but in the intervals of thought that character grows; and for the next few days, Don went about in a quiet muse that aged him more than he knew. He shunned the ravine; he worked with a sort of stupid diligence; and not until Saturday did he even so much as read anything but a schoolbook. But on Saturday morning, he took up his "Faerie Queene" again, and with the first words of the poem a terrible longing gripped him at the heart. He thrust the book in his pocket and hurried out of doors, his cap over his eyes, half-running.

He came breathless to the top of the Park, to the tree under which she used to meet him; and there he stopped, and smiled, and drew a long breath. When he went on again, it was very slowly, his head a little bowed; and when he came to the narrow path that led down into the gully, he stepped back to let her go ahead of him, and nodded and laughed.

At midday, he came out into the road again, with the same slow air. There was no pathetic wistfulness in his face. There was something set and blind in his gaze, but there was also a dreamy smile. And

in the buttonhole of his lapel, he had a little bunch of violets.

A girlish letter from her awaited him on his return to the house; but it was as formal as a schoolroom composition, in spite of its "Dear Don" and its "Your loving friend, Margaret Richardson." It was perfumed faintly, and that made him gulp; but when he had once put it in the little box in which he kept a dried starfish and a bit of broken agate and some other boyish treasures, he did not return to it. His cousin whistled from the lawn while he was at dinner; he pleaded that he had to prepare his Monday's lessons; and as soon as Conroy had gone, he hurried away to his tryst, with his Odyssey in his pocket—and also a penknife with which he was to cut new branches for her seat under the firs.

He came like a sleep-walker to the fallen pine on which they had sat together, and he stopped, smiling, as if it were a barrier in his way. Dexter leaped over it and went on. He looked after the dog, swaying irresolutely. Suddenly, he sat down.

His face had turned pale. A look of pain slowly wrinkled around his eyes. Without moving his head, he lifted his hand to his knee, and his fingers trembled and twitched in a sort of empty groping. He turned —and the blood rushed to his face, and his eyes shut, and his mouth gasped open—and he slipped to his knees on the grass and sank down in it with a sob.

And if he did not understand *then*, it was because the heart-hunger, the ache of longing, the fever of loneliness that seized and shook and burned in him, was like the blow of a grief that stuns.

VII

THE months that followed are no more to be described than the love-fancies of a girl. The boy worked over his books with a mind that was in a mist, and as soon as he was free of school he went to his make-believe meetings like an opium-eater to his dreams. Of what he did there, of what he thought there, he wrote her not a word. He filled his letters with news of the acquaintances whom she had left in Coulton—particularly of Conroy, for whom she inquired. Her own letters were made up of apologies for not being able to write more frequently and of accounts of her boating and bathing and picnicking about the lake. It was a boy and girl correspondence, more idle than chatter. He told her that Dexter was "not very well"; that the stream in the ravine had almost dried out to a trickle because a farmer had dammed it up to make a pool for his cows; that the church had been struck by lightning; that he was writing on his "exams." She sent him blue-print pictures of herself in a group of cottagers on the beach. He pasted them in an old "Composition Book" with her letters.

When his examinations were finished and his school closed, he began to make plans. He would go up to the University for four years. Then he would take his course in the law school and accept

a call to the bar. As soon as he had set up his office, they would be married. He would work till four o'clock every day at his cases—just as he did now at school—but at four o'clock sharp, he would hurry home to her, and they would go for a little walk before supper, and after supper he would read to her until it was time for her to go to bed. It was to be a feather bed, like his mother's. He would kiss her good-night, there, before he went upstairs to his attic.

He could no more have told her of all this than he could have told Conroy. But Dexter's illness ended suddenly—he was found dead on the lawn one August morning—and Don turned to her for consolation. His grief was not as bitter as it would have been six months earlier, but it left him with a feeling that he had only her now. She wrote back, in girlish sympathy, that she wished she were with him in Coulton, or he at the lake with her; that none of the boys were as nice as he. And Don, on the impulse of loneliness, shut himself up in his room and wrote his first love letter.

He told her that he was to spend four years at college, three years at the law school, and then perhaps a year in which to get up a practice. (He had heard his father say it took a long time to work up a practice.) He did not wish to bind her—or anything like that—but if she would just write to him, and let him see her sometimes, and remember that he was waiting for her, he would not care how long he waited or how hard he worked. He would work so hard that they would be rich, and be able to travel,

and have a cottage at the lake to spend their summers in. He would not care if he were never famous —unless, of course, she wished him to be. All he wanted was to make her happy. He felt he could do *that* because he—(He hesitated a long time over the word; he had never known anyone to use it, outside of a book. But there was no other word for it; he understood that women expected a man to say it; and with a tremulous pen he wrote it:)—because he loved her.

He signed it, blushing like a girl, and then he turned his back on the window, put his head down, and shamefacedly kissed the paper. He ran out to post it, so as to have it away from his eyes as soon as possible; and he sat down to wait for the reply.

He was still waiting when his father, coming home from his office early, sent the maid upstairs to tell Don that he was wanted in the library. He went downstairs frightened. His father was sitting by his smoking-table with a newspaper in his hand. "Well," he said, "you 've failed in your examinations."

Don's first thought was that it would postpone his marriage.

"Mr. McCutcheon tells me that your work during the Spring term was uniformly bad."

Postpone his marriage! What would *she* say to that?

"I think I warned you that—what would happen if you continued to waste your time. Your brother has passed *his* examinations at the head of his class."

To work hard! To get rich! He had failed at the very beginning!

"I don't intend to sacrifice his future to yours. I told you I could not send you both to college." He threw down the paper decisively. "I will get you a position down town—in a bank, if I can."

"But—but," Don stammered.

His father turned away. He was used to court-room scenes. He was sorry; but he knew that his decision was wise.

Don stood, stupefied with the horror of the disaster. Then he ran for his room, stumbling up the stairs, holding his breath, in a desperate attempt to get out of sight before he lost control of himself.

The little room that had hidden so many of his boyish griefs sheltered this one too; but it was to be the last. For though he cried like a child for five despairing minutes, he jumped up, then, and shook his fists at the door, and sobbed: "No! No, you won't! . . . No, you won't! No, you won't!" He was engaged to be married; his first duty was to his wife. He had promised her that he would go to college—and be a lawyer. His father stop him?

He laced up his shoes, washed his face frantically, and hurried out. He bought a newspaper and found that he had been "starred" in mathematics. He could write it off in the Supplemental Examination. His father stop him?

He came into his aunt's sitting-room—at the other side of the town—with his cap set awry on his head, pale, and with a face that startled her. "Why, Don!" she said.

He took the newspaper from his pocket. "I 've failed in my examination—in mathematics." His

voice shook, but not with tears. "Father says I can't go to college. If I promise to pay you back, will you lend me the money?"

"Don!" She started toward him.

He backed away; it was no time for caresses. "I can write off the mathematics at the Supplementals. I know I can. I must—I must go." His voice failed him.

"What a shame!" she cried. "Oh! To do such a thing!"

"He says he can't send us both—that Frankie"—

"John!" she called to her husband. "John!" He was already at the door. "What do you think? Roger—he has refused to let Don go to college now. He says Frankie—"

"He says he can't send us both. He says Frankie—"

Mr. McLean came slowly into the room. "Well," he said, "is n't that like him?" He did not love the lawyer.

"I failed in mathematics. I could write it off in September if he 'd let me. He—he says he 'll get me a place in a bank."

His uncle snorted contemptuously. "In a bank. Is n't that like him?"

"He sha'n't do it!" she cried. "What a shame! He 's always been like this about Don. And Frankie—"

"If I could borrow the money," Don pleaded, his under-lip beginning to tremble. "I—I could pay it back."

His uncle looked at him keenly; he swallowed and stood up to it. "How much?"

He shook his head; he could not trust his voice.

His uncle flicked an imaginary speck of dust off his coat front. "Hmmm. Go ahead with your examinations." He took off Don's cap for him, and patted him on the shoulder. "Go ahead and do your work." And when Don had stammered through his thanks and got himself out of the room again, his uncle said: "That—that brother of yours! What 's the matter with him anyway? Educate a boy that way—and then put him in a bank! What use would anything *he* knows be in a bank?" He added, after a moment's thought: "I 'll send Conroy with him, too. He can take some special course. He ought to be allowed to see for himself about how much good this college business *is*."

They had noticed a change in the timid Don; and his father also noticed it at the evening meal: for though Don did not speak, neither did he sulk; he was thoughtful, without being depressed; and he left the table before his father in violation of the parental rule. He said nothing of the scene with his aunt—except to his mother. Her, he told, dry-eyed and resolute, and she listened with an invalid's helplessness, and wept over him. "Your father means it for the best, Don," she pleaded. "I know he does. He thinks you would be better at work."

"I have to go to college," Don said; and that was all he would say.

He went to his room, and remained there, waiting.

He was working at his mathematics when his father came in. "So . . . you have gone to your uncle for money."

Don answered, with his heart in his mouth: "I have to go to college. I don't care how I get there." He did not look up. He drew a shaking line under the problem he had finished, and turned the page to the next.

His father took one quick stride into the room—and stopped. He had never struck Don since that 24th of May. He tried to be strictly just with his boys, and he expected to be strictly obeyed. He saw the defiance in his son's face. "Very good," he said. And without another word, he went out.

Don worked until midnight. Then he took her note from his breast pocket, and knelt down to his prayers with it clasped in his hands. When he went to bed, it was under his pillow.

Two evenings later he received a reply to his love letter. It was from Mrs. Richardson. "My dear Donald," it read. "Margaret, *of course,* has shown me your letter. You are *both* too young to think of such things for years yet. Certainly Margaret is, and I do not wish her to think of them until she has finished her schooling, *at least,* and is old enough to know her own mind. You have your studies to attend to, and I do not think that either of you should waste your time in sentimental correspondence. When you have taken your degree—however, it is better not to think of it. You are both much too young. I was sorry to hear that your pretty dog

had died. Remember me to your aunt. I have asked Margaret not to write. I know you will be a *sensible* boy and understand."

He read it a second time, with the face of a bankrupt. Then he put it away quietly, and returned to his mathematics. At ten o'clock, he took it out again, and slowly tore it to pieces, his lips shut thin and tight.

And Donald was no longer a boy.

He was no longer a boy; and for the time he was no longer a lover. It was as if, having eaten a sickly-sweet Eastern poison, he had come out of dreams and delirium weak and shaken; and the mere thought of the girl gave him an almost physical sensation of empty nausea that sent him, hungrily, to his work. He avoided the books, the walks and the associations that might remind him of her. He grappled with his mathematics in a renewal of mind that rejoiced in its own keenness. He avoided even solitude—except the busy solitude of his studies—and returned to the wholesome companionship of his cousin without any reference to what had separated them. His father, secretly proud of the unexpected determination and independence which his son had shown, watched him in a silence that gave consent to the boy's ambition, but held aloof in a desire to confirm this new strength of spirit by doing nothing to prop it.

It was his mother who gave him word that he would be allowed to go to college and be maintained there as long as he passed the examinations in his

course. It was she who packed his trunk—sitting in her chair and wrapping all his things, needlessly, in tissue paper as white as her own hands—with the eyes of a mother who is sending her boy into those spiritual wars of the world which have made her husband a stranger to her. And it was she, unseen, who still waved good-bye to him from the window when he turned, with Conroy, at the street corner, and saw only the old house standing there, strangely dead and mute, a thing of the past already, all the glow of young expectation gone from it into the unknown scenes to which he was hastening.

PART II

THE DAY-DREAMER

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I

THEY arrived at the college gates on a late September afternoon, and stood to look across the green at the "Norman pile" which was " 'Varsity." Its walls, romantically ivied, rested, as if without foundations, on the perfect level of the lawn; it was flanked, on either wing, by large and solemn oaks; its towers rode in an autumn sunlight that mellowed them with a warm tone—like an old landscape painter's transparent "glaze"—as if rich with culture and ripe with ease; and against the background of the raw civilization around it, that artful imitation of an English university had the effect on Don of the first sight of Rome on a pilgrim. Surprised, in a sort of eager reverence, his lips parted, flushed under the eyes, he looked at it as if he were a young novice come to the studious quiet of a cloister. There was suddenly something beautiful in his face, for although his cheekbones were high and his lips thin, he had that transparent paleness—as clear as fine porcelain—which seems to light up from within at the first glow of enthusiasm; and his eyes, under a boyish wide forehead, were the speaking eyes of a poet.

His cousin—browner, sturdier, his feet firmer on the ground—looked the buildings over with a shadow of distaste. For him, there was something alien and

"imported" in the conventional lawns, the perfect oaks, the carved and battlemented grey walls; and he had the same vague feeling of dissatisfaction that was to irritate him again when he heard the careful "English accent" of some of his teachers. But while he was still looking, a "practice team" of young athletes in the dirt-brown costumes of the football field came running out on the campus, "passing" the ball and dodging with it; and Conroy pricked up his interest with a quick change of expression. "Say, Don," he said, "I 'll bet that 's the Varsity team. They 've been training all summer."

Don nodded, abstractedly.

"Come on," Conroy laughed. "Let 's 'get into this game.' "

They were entered by the Registrar on the rolls of the University as "Donald Bailey Gregg, aged 18, Anglican," taking the course in Political Science as a preparation for the study of the law, and "Conroy Gregg McLean, aged 19, Presbyterian," a special student in Modern Languages. In respectful silence, they enrolled with the spectacled professors whose lectures they were to attend. They wandered through the panelled corridors of the college buildings, walking almost on tip-toe in their efforts to prevent their heels from clattering on the hardwood floors. They found themselves a boarding-house, and unpacked their books. And Donald did all these things almost without emotion, in a sort of thoughtful dulness, incurious, and perversely sad.

When his cousin went out, after supper, to see the

town, he remained in his room, like one of those immigrants who come into the port of their hopes in high spirits, and, having looked over the rail at the strangeness of the land, retire below decks and sit on their trunks, reluctant to go ashore. All the past, which he had put behind him irrevocably, came to him, now, in a more vivid presence than the present itself. The strange room in which he sat "dazing" over his book—as Miss Morris would have said—was lost in the shadows that hung around his lamp; and he was sitting in the room in which he had used to lock himself from Miss Morris's persecutions, the room which he had shared with his imaginary playmate, the room in which he had read his "Faerie Queene," in which he had written his first love letter, in which he had defied his father, in which he had planned his future and thought to leave his past. Celt that he was, he sat there turning over his recollections like the pages of an old book, slowly idealizing even his most unhappy experiences and seeing all beautiful through the mists of regretful memory.

And that mood was to be the dominant one of his first weeks at college. Conroy was separated from him by the divergence of their studies, and Donald avoided his new classmates as shyly as he had his old. They—the prize students of small towns, the ambitious sons of poor farmers—had come, by the hundreds, to study for the "professions" at the expense of the government, with no pocket money beyond what paid their board, working for "free scholarships" with the same untiring labor that had

made clearings in the wilderness and forced crops from the very stones. Shiny at the elbows, clumsy in the feet, they had as little wish to cultivate the social graces as he had himself; and, like him, they came from their boarding-house garrets to their morning lectures, and went from the class rooms to the library and from the library back to the class rooms diligently all day, and returned at last, blinking through the twilight and loaded down with books, to swallow a hasty supper and begin a long evening's work bent double over the discarded "parlor" tables that stood beside their boarding-house beds.

Conroy, of course, joined the ranks of the more leisured students who had time for athletics, college clubs and fraternal societies. He became what was called, in the student slang, "a sport"; whereas Don was already marked as one of the "plugs." The sports had a sharp contempt for these latter—round-shouldered and bilious word-grubbers who worked like convicts and gave the university the atmosphere of a penal institution—and Conroy began to be ashamed of his cousin when they met on the lawns. "You 're getting to be an awful fish," he remonstrated, one night in their room. "A man does n't come to college just for the books. You ought to do something to keep up the—the college spirit."

He, himself, had learned to smoke a "bulldog" briar; he wore a class pin conspicuously on the lapel of his coat; he had an inch of college ribbon sewed in the band of his hat; he had caught the tone of almost brutal frankness which his new companions

used in their social relations with one another. And Don, looking up from his work, saw anew the distance that had widened between them, and could not speak across it.

"I 'm not plugging," he tried to defend himself. "I 'm reading outside of my course."

"Rats!" Conroy retorted. "That 's what they always say."

Don rearranged his books impatiently. "That cant about the college spirit is a trifle stale itself."

"Oh, *is* it? . . . You have a cheek to accuse me of canting."

"You should n't accuse me of being a plug."

"I did n't."

Don's hand trembled as he turned up his lamp. He was not timid in a quarrel, but he was afraid of making a violent end of this friendship that was already too weak to bear the slightest rupture. He did not speak.

Conroy turned his back on the table and stood frowning disgustedly at the shabby discomfort of the room. "We should have gone into Residence," he said, "instead of coming to this hole. . . . If I can get a room there, will you come?"

"I can't afford it. Can't you get one of the other boys to take a room with you?"

"I don't know," Conroy answered. "I might."

He had, in fact, already talked the matter over with a sophomore who had advised him to join "the Residence gang" if he wished a place on the football team; and Don guessed as much from the tone in

which Conroy had said "I might." When his cousin went out rather guiltily, he turned, almost with relief, to the page of his book.

He had come to college with a conception of the universe which he had formed, as a boy, in the Sabbath school, accepting as literally true all the symbols of his religion. And the first lectures in biology and geology had come on him like Miss Morris's first criticisms of his childish fancies. But now, instead of an infantile resentment of change, he had a young man's eagerness for knowledge; he did not pause to examine what he was learning; he hurried along, blindly, with a pathetic trust in the guidance of his teachers, assured that he was rising above his boyish ignorance of Science to the serene heights of wisdom and broad views of life.

In the absorption of such a progress, all his cousin's noisy claims on his time were a trivial interruption. He received calmly the news that Conroy had found a room-mate in the university Residence. And he sat down alone to his studies, on the night after Conroy's removal, like a philosophic anchorite to his meditations.

He had had two startling shocks within the week: —one in a biological lecture that had ended a long series of proofs of the kinship of man with the animals by discussing the intimate physiological relation between man and the anthropoid apes; and the other in a geological lecture in which the professor, having put down the tooth of a mammoth and dusted the black-board chalk from his hands, had announced,

smiling: "We come, now, to the first appearance, so far as we know, of an animal that by reason of a superior development of its brain, was destined to subjugate all the other members of the animal kingdom—the animal which we know as Man." And Donald had been facing the picture of his own infinite littleness in the mighty scheme of a universe which had existed so many ages before the first appearance of that prehistoric animal, the first Man, and which would exist when all the inhabitants of the modern world were fossil remains to an endless future of geologists.

In his later years he was to consider that this same brave Science had once taught confidently that the stars were set in crystal spheres revolving tunefully about the earth, that it had prescribed dissolved pearls as a medicine, and believed the liver to be the seat of love. But now he saw only that his teachers had led him to confront a terrible query—a query which for days he had been afraid to face. If it were true that Man was only an animal of a superior development of brain, and if all animals died the everlasting death—?

In the hope of finding an answer to that query, he had been reading hungrily and in the large. Now he was gulping the conclusions of a materialist who had just said the last word on Science and Immortality; and the book had led him to the plain edge of the depths for which he had hoped it would find him a bridge—and had left him standing there.

When he looked up from the final page of the vol-

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ume, he felt lonely. He missed his cousin from the room.

He rose from his chair and began to pace up and down with a frightened restlessness. He halted, staring at the cheerful glow of his "student" lamp, and finding it, in some strange way, a tragically small light in the vast darkness of the night. He turned with a quiver, struck cold again by the thought that was crouching, like a terror, in his brain. If it were true that death—?

Suddenly, he smiled—the ghastly smile of a man trying to deride his fear. It was impossible that all this immense activity of civilization—all this labor and art and learning, all this doing and suffering, all this loving and nobility, praying and aspiring of man—was the chattering business of a world of untailed apes. God would not—

His smile set on his mouth in a fixed grimace in which there was no mirth. His eyes slowly narrowed and shut as if he had been stricken with a pain in the temples. He jerked back his head, and threw his hands up to his face.

When the stroke had passed, he was on his knees beside his bed, praying—praying with the fervor of a condemned man who has suddenly realized the whole meaning of the sentence of death, praying with the increasing feverishness of doubt, praying against the thought that his prayers were addressed to the deaf heaven of Science that is hung with barren stars and the cold night of endless emptiness. He stopped and looked up, his jaw fallen, as if listening to the

echo of his own whisper on the dead silences, his eyes fixed in a frightened despair—for it seemed to him, now, in his newly critical view of his faith, that he had been believing in another Santa Claus.

II

THESE are the commonplaces of young experience, the growing pains of any spiritual development; but they came on Don with a sudden violence that gave them a staggering weight. He was away from home: that is to say, he was away from the comfortable outlook on life which a man gets from the very permanence of familiar surroundings; he was facing the powers of life and death, alone and in the open; he was the more conscious of his own weakness, more exposed to the assault of doubt, and perhaps more inclined to be contemptuous of the fireside religions. He had been raised in those sheltered beliefs which are, in a way, feminine and sentimental; he had been, for the past few months, thrown upon his own unmothered masculinity in a world that despised the gentle moralities which it preached on one day in seven; and his mind had changed more than he had been aware.

When he woke next morning, it was to a dull acceptance of that loss which had come upon him, the previous night, in such a frantic revolt against bereavement. He looked out his window on the first

soft fall of snow, and remembered that it was Saturday. His studies lay around him, dead of interest, like the ruins of an avocation. He went downstairs, listlessly, his hands in his pockets, and ate his breakfast with the mechanical appetite which follows a stress of emotion. And then he muffled himself up in his overcoat and winter gloves, and with his head bent against a mild wind he began to walk.

He had intended to walk in a comfortable daze, quite thoughtless, with the snow-flakes clogging his eyelashes and the wind crooning in his ears. But his mind was unusually alert, his observation greedy of every sight he passed; and when he came to the main business street of the town—turning northward in an unconscious habit of direction—he saw the life around him with an involuntary wonderment, as if it were suddenly new to him; and he watched the actions of the men and women on the sidewalks and in the shops as if they had been a race of animals whose cheerful acceptance of a brief and tragic lot was an inexplicable mystery to him. He saw them even with pity as they smiled and nodded and chattered to one another —with the pity which one would feel for the playfulness of a butcher's animals; and he did not at all confound himself in their fate, but walked among them as unconsciously self-superior as a philosopher who has just proved the nothingness of all things, and who feels the personal importance of his triumphant intellectuality and the great distinction of his act.

The feeling raised him to a lonely isolation, and as he neared the quieter suburbs he was reminded of

the streets of Coulton and of the companion who had used to join him at the top of the Park. Nor was it so much of a reminding—for, of course, she had been dwelling in the painful background of his mind at all times. It was a sudden leaping of her image into the vacant interest which his studies had been occupying, a weaker yielding to the thoughts which he had kept resolutely out of his busy days. And he did not think of her with pity, as he did of these others. The mood is likely to be over-expressed in any words: but she took her place beside his own conception of himself and companioned him among these shadows of men and women like an immortal walking with him in a futile and passing world.

He began to chat with her, in an imaginary conversation, at first rather sadly, but without any reference to the cause of his tragic manner, for he had the same instinct to shield her from his doubts as he had had to protect Frankie from the discovery that Santa Claus was a myth. She asked him about his studies, about Conroy, about the life at college; and her questions were as unexpected as the conversation which one carries on in dreams. He saw her downward smile, the eyelash on her cheek, the quick side glance which she raised to him, rather shyly because of their long separation; and he looked down to see whether she wore her rubbers in the snow, and, while he replied to her, he watched her little feet appearing and disappearing below the hem of her skirt. The pleasure which he took out of it all was a thing not to be described. On top of his lonely misery, it was

more real than any real joy could possibly have been, since it was outside of all halting actuality, purely ideal.

He turned with her into an open road that led up the side of a hill; and they stopped at the top of it to look back at the town, where it lay in the cup of a valley, facing the lake. He explained to her that, according to the geologists, this range of hills had been the shore-line in the "glacial period"; she wished that she had studied geology; he shook his head sadly. In order the better to see, they climbed the bank that edged the road, and stood together under a huge bare elm that raised above them its interweaved branches, fantastically touched with snow. He brushed off a great root that writhed up from the frozen ground; and they sat down on it to look over the city.

He was still sitting there when the sun came out, and he was smiling, with a rapt expression, at the horizon. She had her hands in a fur muff on her knees, and her cheeks were rosy with the wind. Without turning, he saw her so; and he listened to her with the face of a lover. Below him were all the houses of the town, and they had suddenly become the nests which love had built for its shelter. All the business of those streets—which had an hour before seemed so inexplicable to him—was now the joyful activity of men who were working to bring home the daily bread to their mates. All the misery and the sin of that city were the absence, the debasing, the denial of love. Geology, history—all the parched and

sterile sciences of the lecture room—were a study of the dry bones and fossils of a life from which love had departed. Beauty was the face of Love; Truth was the voice of Love. God Himself—and it came to him as a hope which he seized upon as a discovery—was the divine principle of Love which gave a meaning to the universe.

"Aren't your hands cold?" she asked.

"Not very."

"Put one in here," she said, and moved her muff across her knees to him.

He touched her gloved fingers in that warm nest of fur. She smiled. The sunlight swam with a sudden glory of light in the moist happiness that clouded his eyes. And Don-a-Dreams had found himself again in the love dream of youth and the poets.

SHE had come—like the imaginary playmate who had consoled him for the loss of his picnic on the 24th of May—to companion him in a world that had grown to be a place of doubt and terror to him; and she kept him from the thought of a darkness which he dared not think of. But he did not allow her to make any change in the outward manner of his days. As if he had been a criminal or a conspirator with some secret double life to conceal, he even frequented more than usual any crowded assemblies of the students, and watchfully applauded at the meetings of the debating society, and cheered the assaults at arms in the gymnasium, and listened with a diligent pretence of absorption in the lecture rooms. Not that

he did any of these things consciously, or by plan; it was instinctive with him to conceal the thought of this presence that hung around him like a ghost; and the instinct made him show an open interest in life and his acquaintances, at the same time that it made it impossible for him to come to terms of intimacy with any friends. He spent an occasional evening with Conroy in his room at Residence, and he listened silently, but with a smile, to the conversation of Conroy's new friends; and he was as nearly as possible unnoticed by them there. He particularly absented himself from the college "socials" in which young women participated; he studied less in the library, and took fewer books to his room at night. For the rest, he usually walked out for an hour before going to bed; and he invariably spent his Saturdays and his Sundays on the country roads or in that network of ravines and river bottoms which holds back the northeastern suburbs of the city.

It was on one of these night walks—a frozen December night—that Conroy, on his way home from the theater, saw Don ahead of him sauntering up the line of dark shop-windows towards his boarding-house—and stopped him with an over-eager hail of greeting. Since their separation, Conroy had had a guilty feeling that he had deserted an old friend treasonably; he had explained the incident, in a letter to his mother, as due to Don's inability to pay for anything better than a "beastly uncomfortable" boarding-house room in which it was unhealthful to live; and his mother had tactfully persuaded Don to accept an extra al-

lowance from her on the easy condition that he should pay it back when he was able. Conroy was curious to know what his cousin was doing with his money—for he was obviously not spending it.

Don had started at his cousin's cheery shout, and jerked his hand out of the bosom of his coat, and let his arm—that had been crooked—swing ostentatiously at his side. He met Conroy with a curious expression which puzzled the boy. "What 're you doing down here, anyway, Don?" he asked.

"Taking a walk. What 're you?"

Conroy replied that he had been at the theater, but he ended the explanation with a return to his curiosity regarding Don. "Working pretty hard?"

"Oh yes," Don laughed. "Plugging as hard as ever."

That reference to the unmentioned cause of their separation silenced Conroy. They walked along without a word, crunching the snow under their heels. Suddenly Conroy asked: "Do you ever hear from her, now?"

Don turned, with a startled "Who?"

"Margaret—Miss Richardson."

"What made you ask *that*?"

There was again, in his face, that faint suggestion of guilty confusion which Conroy had noticed when they met. "I don't know," the cousin answered, embarrassed. "I 'd seen so little of you lately. I thought that, perhaps—Jessie wrote me the other day that she 'd heard she was coming here, after Christmas, to study music at the Conservatory."

"Who?"

"Miss Richardson."

"Coming here?"

"Yes. To the Conservatory."

After an interval of thought, Don said: "Oh! I had n't heard."

When they separated at a street corner, Don thrust both hands deep in his overcoat pockets and paced along alone in a slow absorption of thought; and when he came to the door of the boarding-house, he let himself in without any smiling pause for parting on the threshold.

She was coming back. His "imaginary playmate" was "coming true" again. The news had brought him down to real life with the bewildering shock of a sudden awakening.

III

THERE intervened his Christmas holiday at home—a momentous holiday; for after the first rush of greetings, he found himself standing before Frankie and his sister and even his mother herself, a stranger in a life from which he had grown away; and the inevitable readjustment began at once almost with pain. Of them all, his mother had clung most closely to his thoughts, from the day he had opened his trunk—and found his handkerchiefs so fondly packed in tissue papers tied with ribbons—to the day he had received

her little hoard of Christmas savings with a request that he buy this for Frank and that for Mary and a dozen other gifts and remembrances for his cousins and his aunt. Her letters to him had been full of news and comment—the letters of a woman who looked on life from the windows of her sick room with a spectator's interest and sympathy. He had felt her watching him in all his absence. He had seen her sitting over her needlework, thinking of him. And he had come to her, now, with a heart full of affection.

But when he sat down opposite her chair, still smiling and blushing awkwardly from the caress of welcome, he found himself facing the loving scrutiny of her gaze; and he looked away quickly, conscious of the change in himself, his beliefs, his outlook on life, his hidden thoughts and the growth of experiences in which she had had no part. It seemed to him that she would penetrate the secret behind his eyes if she saw into them clearly. And this very attempt of concealment betrayed him to her. With a mother's quick suspicion, she began to seek him out, with those apparently trivial questions which are like the tappings of a tiny hammer on the suspected panels of a wainscoating.

They found him by the silences with which he tried to cover his boy's secrets. It took her days to do it; but in the long talks which they had together in her room—sitting with the winter sunlight on the lace curtains and her needle busy in the embroidery with which she occupied her wasted hands—she probed

him unerringly because of the very acuteness of her sympathy and the anxiety of her love. Concerning the girl—whoever it might be—she had no fear. She trusted the innocence of his youth. But it was this very innocence that she feared in the matter of his religion; and when to a pointed question of his belief, he replied desperately: "I 'd—I 'd rather not discuss it," the thought of her boy tempted and miserable kept her awake all night.

She felt that he needed a father's guidance. He was almost a man, now, and it must be that a man would understand him. When he stood before her, tall and quiet—as if thoughtful with his experience of that outer world from which he came into her four-walled prison of sickness—she was so conscious of his new manliness that she looked up to him almost as she looked up to her husband. They were of the same world and the same sex. Perhaps the father could help the son.

That she could have thought of such a plan showed how little she understood the silent lawyer. But she knew that he was constant in his attendance at church, that he took up the collection at the morning service, that he had been employed in legal matters by the bishop, that he was a trustee of the new hospital which had just been built by the Anglicans of the town. He never spoke of religion to her, but he never spoke of politics either, or indeed of any of the interests that kept him busy all day.

She put the case to him in timid hints and queries: Had Don acted strangely in church? Had he spoken

of his beliefs at all? She had heard that the university education had a tendency to make boys irreligious. Oh, Don had not *said* anything, but she was afraid that there was something wrong. She had not felt able—would *he* speak to Don?

He would. And he did.

He did it with the cleverness of a mind skilled in betraying witnesses into admissions which they did not wish to make—betraying them not by brow-beating and bewildering them with questions, but by an insinuating friendliness and a flattering attention to their involved replies. He began by congratulating Don on his attendance at church—(whither the boy had gone because he knew that to remain away would be to give his mother pain.) So many Universitiy men, Mr. Gregg had noticed, made a license of their college liberty in order to escape their church duties. It was a great mistake—a mistake which they always regretted later in life. A man depended on his fellow-men for a living in the organized union which we call society; and the church was an organization within the larger body, an organization primarily for worship on the lines of a common belief—

"But," Don interrupted, feeling the intolerable hypocrisy of his silence, "there are things one can't believe in."

"Certainly," his father assented, with no change of voice. "There are government policies that I do not believe in, but I do not therefore revolt against the will of the majority. A man may not believe in capital punishment, but he need not break open the

jails to release murderers. Church membership, for a lawyer particularly—"

He stopped to raise his hat to a fellow church-member and his wife; and Don, looking down at the powdered snow which he threw up with an impatient shuffle of the foot, put in quickly: "I don't think I 'm—law does n't appeal to me."

His father asked mildly: "What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know. I thought—"

"Yes?"

"I thought that the university education alone—"

"Along what lines?"

"I—I had n't decided."

They were at their gate. Mr. Gregg paused with his hand on it and gave Don a stern face and a sudden change of tone. "If you are *not* going to study law, you must decide what you *are* going to study. We will talk this over to-night."

Don followed him up the path like a boy led to chastisement. And as long as his father was visibly before him—tall and grave and authoritative—the son's young habit of respect and obedience kept his thought cowed. But as soon as the mid-day dinner had ended and Don had shut himself in his room, shame and resentment rose in him in a dangerous revolt. He had been tricked; that sudden change from suavity to sternness had been the springing of the trap; the man had played on him with hypocrisy. And for the instant Don despised him.

More than that: in his absence at college, Don had

come to see his father as he saw other men, not as a superior creature to be looked up to with awe, but as a human animal—like himself—grown old and hard and mechanical—though he had once been young and had known the enthusiasm of love and marriage—cleverly using his brain to support his wife and family, and pathetically nearing the obscurity of his grave. He saw him, if not with strong affection, at least with pity and respect, as a man who had made the best of an undistinguished success in law and who lived without vices. And if he saw no more in him than this, it was because the father—living up to that stern ideal of British parents which the race has brought to Canada—had never tried to make himself beloved by his sons but only respected and obeyed.

It is doubtful whether Don, as he went downstairs to that night's interview, went with any respect for the man he was to face. Certainly, he did not intend to obey him. Their short colloquy on the way home from church had been to the boy a brief and misleading glimpse into his father's mind; and he had constructed a whole life of politic hypocrisy from the lawyer's confession of faith in the worldly advantages of church membership. He did not suspect that his father had been through a struggle with these same doubts which now assailed himself; that he had arrived at a working compromise with them and made a peace; that he had preserved the integrity of his own mind without resisting the police of organized religion. Still less did Don suspect that the older man, remembering his own youth, felt a reluctant

sympathy for this beginner in life with all the problems of his world thick about him. Don saw his father, merely, as a lawyer whose practice in the courts had dulled his sense of truth and justice and the ideals behind the statutes and had left him only the lesson of conformity which is so often the essence of the law to the priest and the practitioner.

It gave the boy new cause to hate the profession. His mind, at college, had turned from the thought of it with distaste, and rose against it—now that it was to be forced on him—with an almost desperate repulsion. His aunt's allowance, added to the money which he had saved from his small expenses at college, would put him through whatever "course" he chose to take. He would not quarrel with his father, but he would not submit to him.

He entered the "study" with a volume which he pretended he had come to return to its shelf. He found his father walking up and down the room, smoking a curved pipe. A gas lamp, with a frosted shade, lit a precise arrangement of books and papers on the table. Don walked past them almost defiantly, and turned his back from the bookcase.

Mr. Gregg said abruptly: "I judge from your college 'Calender' that your Political Science course does not really begin until your second year. Is that correct?"

Don answered, without turning: "Yes, sir."

Mr. Gregg cleared his throat. "You have until then to make up your mind what you are going to do."

Don waited, shutting the glass doors of the book-

case slowly. When he turned around, his father had sat down in his easy chair and taken up his book. Don understood that judgment had been rendered, and started awkwardly toward the door. It seemed a great distance across the room. He had his hand on the door-knob when his father added: "Meanwhile, for your mother's sake if not for your own, you will go to church and try to behave yourself."

Don got himself out, in silence, with his ears burning. As he closed the door behind him, he heard his father strike a match.

Crestfallen, dismissed with all his heroic insubordination unnoticed, he went upstairs ashamed of himself, and—in spite of himself—admiring the strength that had taken him up, considered him briefly, given him a curt decision, and then turned to other matters with the calm re-lighting of a pipe. For a moment, he doubted whether this old brain might not know what was best for him to do; whether he would not be wise to study law and be at peace with his father. But it was only for a moment. Law was to him a dead and dried collection of classified statutes, printed in old books, in a formal jargon as repellent as the scientific names on a museum of beetles. Life as a lawyer would be life in a musty library with a continual droning of court arguments coming to him through green baize doors, and all the sunlight and freedom of love and happiness beating on the closed windows that shut him in. He shook his head, drawing a long breath of relief. He was free. He had five months in which to choose a career. All the

world was before him, like a garden full of inviting paths; and somewhere in the center of it, in a secret green recess, *she* sat waiting, with a bunch of violets gathered for him in her hand, and a girlish smile of welcome trembling in a sort of timorous expectation on her lips.

THAT thought filled his last week at home with a restless impatience. It was as if he were about to start on a tour of the world, and had a week to wait for his date of sailing. He chafed under the enforced inaction of the long sittings with his mother, looking wistfully out of the window, until she silently reproved herself for keeping him too much indoors and unselfishly let him go. (He had said nothing of his interview with his father, but she did not resent his reticence. Her husband had accustomed her to silence, and, like the deaf, she read faces, without words.) She let him go, and he tramped the streets of Coulton in the footprints of his past, marvelling to see how the life of the little town stood rooted, like a village seen from the window of a railroad car as the years whirled him along. The Park was incredibly small—the park in which he and Conroy had roamed as if it had been a prairie. His ravine, leafless and frozen, was bare and mean, with a little gurgle of water under thin ice. His aunt bored him. His cousins sat and looked at him, unable to reach his interest, or teased and fought around him as if he were not in the room. He came back to his home like a reluctant visitor, feeling the presence of the taciturn head of the house as soon as he saw the maples that stood

along the fence, and entering the front door with the silent droop in spirit of a dog suddenly brought to heel.

His whole life was opening before him, inviting him like an adventurous and breezy road; and in those days of waiting, he resolved that wherever that road might lead him, it should bring him back to Coulton—except as a hasty visitor—never again.

IV

He woke to his expected liberty, on the following Sunday morning, in his boarding-house room—a room as small as a squirrel-cage, with its slanting roof and its dormer window the sash of which, hung loosely on hinges, allowed a powdered snow to sift in on the sill. The railroad journey of the previous night had been an impatient flight to this haven of lonely freedom; and he had fallen asleep, too tired to think, with a happy assurance that the next day would rise on his new life.

It had risen. The sun was bright on window-panes that were white with a hoar frost as thick as a lichen. His trunk, still unstrapped, stood in a corner. His lamp was on his table, his books on the shelves of the "what-not" which served him as a bookcase. It was as if he were in a cabin on board ship, a night's sail from land; and he was eager to be out on deck to see the new horizon.

He jumped from his bed, and the cold closed on

him as invigorating as an icy bath. It was nine o'clock by his watch. He scrambled into his clothes, his teeth chattering laughably. The water from his cracked basin stung on his hands and face. He smiled at the ghostly reflection of himself in the mirror that was as dull as a sheet of tin; and he laughed when he found that his watch, lying on the marble top of his washstand, had been stopped over night by the penetrating cold of the stone. He went downstairs on tip-toe, in the silence of a house asleep, put on his overcoat and fur cap like a thief, and opened the front door on a sparkling level of new-fallen snow that lay, untracked—an unbroken wonder, a white spell of silence—over the empty street. He stood a moment, on the edge of it, almost reluctant to break the charm. Then he drew his cap down to his ears, and with an unvoiced shout of high spirits he ran down the porch steps and waded in.

The sunshine blinded him, breaking into prismatic colors on the lashes of his half-closed eyes. The snow silenced his footsteps. There was not even a stir of wind to make life around him. He walked in an enchanted world, through the stillness of a Sunday morning, his thought singing ecstatically, in a croon of pleasure, like a child at play.

He went without design, without direction. But unconsciously he turned into the way that led to college, and he strode along, swinging his arms, his head down against the sun, glancing at the houses which he passed, and smiling—with all the contempt of his frost-bitten and tingling alertness—at thought of the

warm sloth of the sleepers indoors. He caught a glimpse of a face at a lower window, but the frozen brilliance of a lawn gleamed between him and it, and he could not see it clearly. He slowed his pace at the next street corner, and hesitated there until he remembered that the Conservatory of Music stood in the middle of the block below: then he turned in that direction, with the scarcely conscious intention of looking at the door through which she was to enter to her studies and the windows from which she was to look out.

He was thinking of her blissfully, deep in his dreams, when he heard a muffled sound of hurried footsteps behind him. He was in front of the Conservatory, now, and he walked very slowly, to let the passerby go before him, so that he might stand and gaze if he pleased. He heard a quick breath at his elbow. He pretended to be curiously interested in the red stone building, bald and formal, among its stripped trees. A low voice—her voice—choked with mischief, asked: "Well? How do you like it?"

She was gasping between laughter and the attempt to catch her breath, flushed with the exertion of overtaking him and enjoying almost hysterically the awkwardness of his surprise. He stammered: "Why—how—" He was not conscious of taking the hand which she held out to him. He stared at her in a dumb amazement that was ludicrous. "How did you—"

"I saw you pass the house. Did n't you see me?—at the window?"

He shook his head blankly. "No. Was it you—following me?"

She nodded, breathless.

"Why did n't you call out?"

"I—I could n't." She freed her hand from him and pressed it against her side, panting. "I was walking so fast, I could n't. Why did you stop?"

He did not take his fascinated gaze from her to indicate the building; he jerked his head back at it, beginning to smile as a slow blush of pleasure burned up into his face. "Conroy told me—"

"That I was coming?"

"Yes—to study music." His smile was for himself now as he saw the situation. "I came to see whether you were here yet."

"Really?" He had not changed, she thought; his face was a little older, a little thinner; but his smile was the same unguarded, boyish grin. She laughed in a sudden release of her pent-up excitement, her amused scrutiny deepening to a frank regard of sympathy, as warm as a clasp of hands.

It brought his own ardor into his face, glowing and tender. "Yes," he said. "Really." And his voice shook on the word with a husky tremble.

She looked away from him in quick embarrassment, glancing around her at the frozen silence that held them in the heart of an immense calm. "Is n't—is n't it funny? Why is it so quiet?"

She wore a little sealskin cap set jauntily on the dark brown luster of her hair, and under a wave of that—as she turned—he saw the rosy-tender dainti-

ness of her ear, a little curled shell of an ear that appealed to everything masculine in him as the sight of an infant's wrinkled fingers will appeal to all the maternal in a woman. He heard himself reply: "Well, it 's Sunday. And it can't be more than eight o'clock yet."

She felt his look on her, and could not turn to meet it. "Would n't she scold if *she* knew—mother She had a cough. I left her in bed."

He blinked the existence of her mother—of everyone but the two of them alone and together. "Have you had your breakfast?"

"No. . . . Have you?"

"No." He added daringly, in a voice that belied the attempted bravado of his smile: "I could n't wait. I wanted to see you."

She tried to laugh at him again. "You *funny* boy!"

"I knew I 'd meet you."

"How?"

"I don't know. Are you going to church?"

The hungry directness of the appeal confused her. "I suppose so. Yes. After breakfast."

"Where? What one?"

"Whichever 's the nearest."

"St. Stephen's?"

She tried to fence with him, to get time to think. "Is that the nearest?"

"Yes." He waited.

She looked around her vaguely. "Where is it?"

"I 'll show you. After breakfast. . . . *May* I?"

She had never before seen that expression in a face, or heard that tone in a voice; and they frightened her at the same time that they thrilled and flattered her. "Oh, goodness!" she faltered. "I must hurry back—before they come down—and miss me." She started, with a quick step, toward the house; and he stumbled in the snow as he turned with her, looking at her—instead of watching the path he was walking—and gone suddenly dumb. "I hope they don't see me," she said. "You must n't come to the door." She stopped abruptly. "How *ever* shall I tell mother!"

He asked, startled: "Tell her what?"

"Why, that I—I ran after you?"

"*Don't* tell her. Tell her you met me at church. I 'll meet you there."

She hinted guiltily: "I promised her I would n't write."

"Well, you did n't, did you?"

"No, I only wrote Jessie. But if I make an appointment to meet you, is n't that—"

"Don't make it. I 'll meet *you*."

"Where?"

"You 're not to know. What time will you be going—to church?"

She started forward rapidly again, without answering, but he kept pace with her. "To St. Stephen's?" he pressed her. "It 's right ahead of us—about four blocks up the street." When she did not reply, he suggested, with an appealing timidity: "At ten o'clock?"

At last, she said, almost in a whisper, her face shamefully suffused: "Yes, . . . but you must n't come any further now. There 's the house—where you see those little trees along the 'boulevard'." She put out her hand. "Good-bye."

He held it a moment. "Good-bye."

When she glanced back from the gate, he was standing where she had left him, his hand half raised from releasing hers, gazing after her.

She disappeared; and he looked about him, blinking, like a man who has seen a vision and does not recognize the familiar and unchanged world in which it has left him.

He turned dazedly down the street. Beautiful! How beautiful she was! That was his first thought. And it was not a thought so much as a mental picture of her which he could gloat over now, in silence, without the distraction of speech. He framed her face in the hollow of his hands and held it before him—the dear girl's face, laughing up at him from its dimples, with a tenderer gleam in the mischievous eyes! Beautiful! Beau—He came down with a startling jolt from the sidewalk into the drifted gutter. He pulled himself together with a half laugh, and hurried away down the avenue like one possessed.

And he *was* possessed. His eyes were possessed by her smile, his ears by the note of her voice, his brain by the trivial words she had spoken, his nerves by the thrill that had set him shaking when he had tried to say good-bye to her. She had taken him, body and

mind; and his blood was in a fever, and his thoughts were deliriously confused. But even so, there was something spiritual in his frenzy. He thought of her as the boy of the classic fable must have thought of his goddess when she descended to him—Diana!—from her moon. After the first hungry obsession that had made him take her face in his hands, he stood back from her as from something holy. She was what the poets had made woman to him. She was something so nearly divine that she was to be almost worshipped with that passionate reverence which the poets make of love. All his religious emotions, turned back from their proper outlet by the scepticisms of Science, flowed out to her in the tide of desire. His make-believes, his day-dreams of her, had surrounded her with a sort of glory that was part of the bewitchment of her beauty. He did not even dare, in his thought, to kiss her hand.

And yet, that was not all. The process of his mind was not so high fantastical alone. With the complexity of a brain that was trained to cheat itself with its own make-believes but still was never ignorant that it was being cheated, Don was aware that his relations with her were not to be simply those of blind worship and accepted love. Her frightened confusion, when his voice had betrayed him, warned him, now, that mere ecstasy and ardor would only drive her from him; that he must be politic; that she was a human being judging him in accordance with the conventions of human society, and not as clairvoyant as a goddess or as untrammeled as an ideal.

He understood that he was in a game against her, a game of courtship with his happiness at stake; and with all the madness of a lover, he developed some of the instinctive craftiness as well.

He began to plan, walking more deliberately and frowning in his effort to think. He recognized that her mother, of course, would be the great opponent of any free intercourse with her; and though he might perhaps call on her, in the restricted circle of parental surveillance, that would be to bring the lady of his dreams down to the commonplaces of everyday life, and he rejected the thought. What he wanted was her alone, away from everybody else in the world, as he had had her in the innocent beginnings of their companionship at Coulton, as he had always had her in imagination, since.

He finished his walk at the bowed pace of troubled meditation.

THE mistress of the house in which he boarded had a motherly regard for her studious guest, and served him without intruding any remarks upon him whenever she saw him preoccupied with thought. Her daughter, long since discouraged in the first attentions of a somewhat stale coquetry, had fallen back on a disdainful silence in her unavoidable meetings with him, and spoke of him with the contempt of a critic whose appreciations had been despised. The nine-year old son who completed the family was always silently engaged at breakfast in an attempt to avoid eating porridge—which he hated unhealthily

and his mother made him eat—by smuggling as much of it as possible into his coffee cup, drinking off the overflow of coffee and emptying the guilty mug, later, in the kitchen. Mother, daughter and son left Don to his plans.

Nevertheless, when he went out to waylay Margaret on her road to church, he had formed no design for circumventing the difficulties in his path. He saw no further than the fact that he was to meet her again. It was, perhaps, for the last time, alone; but, at least, it was this once; and he took what joy he could from that concession of circumstance.

V

He had been pacing up and down in the cold, for fifteen minutes, kicking his toes into his heels to keep his feet warm, idling at corners and turning a dozen times in a block to see whether she was coming behind him—trembling with hope at one thought, shivering with cold and the prospect of disappointment at the next—when he saw her between the avenue trees, walking toward him slowly, graceful against the shining background of the snow, her head down with the appearance of knowing that she was doing wrong. And the flush of pleasure with which he had sighted her, faded out in uneasiness as her manner became more reluctant and unjoyful with her approach.

"I 'm not going to church," she announced hurriedly. "I can't stay away from mother so long. She is—we 're afraid she may be catching pneumonia."

He dropped his hand from his cap. His disappointment was so complete that it left him blank; he had nothing to say.

She turned over the snow with her foot, and patted it down nervously. "I 'm sorry," she said, "but I—"

"Oh, it 's all right," he put in bravely. "Only I 'll not have a chance to—I hope it is n't serious?"

"We don't know yet."

"What does the doctor say?"

She shook her head. "We have n't sent for him. We 're waiting to see."

"Oh." He watched her working at the snow.

After an awkward silence, she said: "I must hurry right back." And there was a half-heartedness in the way she said it, as if she were assuring herself that she meant to do it, very soon.

He caught the note. "Won't you walk to the corner and back? It 's better . . . waiting . . . out here."

A "cutter" passed them with a rousing jingle of bells. The sunlight was etching the shadow of bare branches on the snow. He saw in her face that she felt the contrast between the crisp brilliancy of the morning and the heavy atmosphere of indoors.

"Well," she agreed, as if conditionally.

When they had gone a few steps, he asked: "Have you ever seen the college?"

"No. . . . Is it far?"

"Just two streets over—to the grounds."

"Well."

She stepped out more briskly, having made a truce with her conscience, apparently; and when he asked "Have you left Horton?" she answered "Oh, yes. I did n't go back this year at all. We did n't know *quite* what we were going to do."

"About what?"

"About everything! Mother has been having difficulty—with lawyers, you know—about property—I mean 'titles'—in father's will, and now she has won the cases and sold everything and invested the money, and she wants to travel—to Germany or some place where I can study music—or New York."

"Are n't you going to be at the Conservatory?"

She hastened to reassure his dismay. "Yes, yes. For this term. Of course! . . . Mother may leave me here, with Mrs. Kimball, and go down south for the winter. She has been talking of it since September—and this cold may drive her away."

"Oh?" The aching apprehension which her greeting had started in him, had been slowly easing. Now there began to work in its place a bubbling sense of happiness that was as unreasonable as an intoxication. He struggled to repress his smiles. He looked down at the snow on the sidewalk and up at the snow in the crotches of the trees. He fastened the button of his heavy glove, inspecting it narrowly, with the manner of a girl who is in danger of giggling in church. "I hope it won't be as bad as that," he said in a false voice.

"What?"

"Her cold."

"No. . . . I hope not." She glanced around at him, but he pretended to be examining the front of a house across the road. She put up her hand to pat and finger the coil of hair at the back of her head; and when he looked at her again, noticing her silence, he saw that her arm was shaking.

"Wh—what 's the matter?"

The irrepressible quiver of laughter in his voice set her off; and with her first convulsive choke, he snickered. They began to laugh in a sort of suppressed hysteria, blundering along through the snow together, unable to look at each other and breaking out into fresh spasms of giggles infectiously like a pair of children.

"I did n't say anything," he protested.

"You 're so funny!" she cried. And that started them afresh.

They had gone a block before they recovered control of themselves; and even then their conversation was interspersed with unreasoning smiles and amused silences. But that laughter had broken down the restraint that separated them; it had joined them in an unconscious conspiracy against her mother; and it had brought them nearer to the camaraderie of their Coulton days. No matter what commonplaces they spoke now, there was a sparkling undercurrent, unexpressed and really inexpressible, flowing beneath their words, almost in a secret understanding, like the furtive twinkles of two actors who had been joking together in the wings before they came out on

the stage to speak their lines. With Don, the acting was not unconscious; he was well aware that he was not voicing the tumult of his heart. But with her, the inner working of her thought was in the more complicated spirit of a mild flirtation. She knew that she was playing with fire, for the first flame in Don's eyes, that morning, had frightened her; but he had hidden it now, though she knew it was still there; and while, in her words, she refused to recognize it, she fed it with glances, with smiles, with little dimpling blushes, warmed and excited by it, girlishly.

She asked him what he had been doing at college; and he told her what lectures he had been taking and what subjects he preferred. She asked him how he had spent his Christmas; and he replied with report of the friends whom she had left in Coulton and of the small events of the town. They made no reference to that past which included his love letter and its result. He said nothing of his constant thought of her, nothing of his revolt against the dictation of his father, nothing of his inner life at all. He kept their conversation on the easy plane of friendly chatter; and when she brushed against his shoulder, in a narrowing of the path, he did not speak until the choke of emotion had died down again in his throat.

She liked skating better than toboganning; he had done very little of either. She recalled with enthusiasm a "bobbing" party which the girls had had at Horton, last winter, on a moonlit night; and he laughed at her description of how she had blown a

tin horn in the ear of a teacher whom she disliked. He learned that she was contemptuous of boys who wore "spring skates, you know," instead of the hockey skates which screwed to the sole of the shoe; and he marked the distinction in his memory as if it were a point of correct dress to be observed. And he was so unaffectedly interested in everything she said—in such sympathetic accord with all her likes and dislikes, and so eager to hear every scrap of information that would help him to imagine her in the life which she had led in their separation—that she enjoyed her walk like a princess among courtiers and rewarded him, regally, with her smile.

When they saw the towers of "Varsity" showing in dark grey above the snow-powdered tops of the pines which screened the building from this approach, he was reminded of his cousin, and asked quickly: "Have you seen him—Conroy—yet?"

"Not yet."

"He will be calling to see you as soon as he hears."

"I suppose so. Yes."

"If your mother 's not too ill."

"But," she laughed, "I did n't say she was so ill. It was Mrs. Kimball who was afraid she might be getting pneumonia. I just—I did n't like to say I was going to church without her, so I said I was going. . . to take a little walk. . . while the sun was out."

"Oh." When he had readjusted his thoughts to that change in the situation, he went on boldly: "I might call with him, then?"

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"I 'm sure—Yes, of course. Why not?"

He suggested, in as matter-of-fact a tone as possible: "If you wrote to him, telling him where you are, he 'll ask me to go with him . . . I think."

The quick glance she gave him, archly, accepted the small deception which the plan implied. "Well," she agreed.

They walked in a guiltily-smiling silence until they came to the side gate of the college grounds. Their agreement required that Conroy should not see them together. Don said: "He 's in Residence, you know," and nodded toward the building.

She turned quickly. "I must n't go any further. I 've been away so long already."

"That 's so," he said. "Let 's go back by the avenue."

It was the longest way round.

As soon as the college was out of sight in the trees, the hush of their small conspiracy lifted again, and they went along with their chatter, stepping out against a wind that was sifting the snow down on them from the branches overhead. He asked her whether she was cold—because the question gave him an excuse for looking at her with a lingering apprehension. She replied that she was not, but tried to turn up her collar to show him a woman's appreciation of his thought of her comfort. And when the collar came up awkwardly, she let him help her with it, and pretended not to notice the reverent timidity with which he did it.

"Are n't you too?" she asked. "Turn yours up,"

—repaying him with innocent full eyes that enjoyed the confusion they created.

"Oh, I 'm—I 'm all right," he stammered, but raised the collar obediently with an expression of face at once so pleased and so blushingly grateful that it appealed to her affection like the clumsy devotion of the awkward age.

She continued their conversation in a more serious tone for the remainder of the way, drawing from him the confession that he did not intend to study law but did not know what he *did* intend to study; and when they stopped at the street corner below her house again, she gave him her hand with demure good wishes for his success in whatever "course" he decided to follow; and he carried away with him a memory of her gentle confidence that was at once a benediction and a surety for hope.

He took a long walk, that afternoon, to the elm where he had fancied her sitting with him looking down on the town; and he stood there in the snow, leaning against the tree, his eyes fixed on the distant spire of St. Stephen's that marked the quarter in which she lived. After supper, he locked himself in his room, and having lit his lamp and opened his books, he spent the evening in idleness, trying to draw a picture of her in lead pencil on a page of his note book, tantalized by the visual memory of her which he could not reproduce—or abandoning himself to it, with closed eyes, resting his head and arms on the table, smiling blindly—until the cold drove him to bed. There, he lay on his back, his hands

clasped over his head, staring at the blackness in which he saw sudden retinal images of her that flashed and vanished. And he tried to make his bed rock down through the floor to "Slumberland"—in a return to his childish fancies—holding to the memory of her in the hope that he might compel her to come into his dreams; and he woke, with a start, his arms numb, his shoulders aching, and found the thought of her again, and cuddled down with it under the bedclothes like a child who wakes frightened, and finds its mother's hand there in the dark.

VI

It was next day that Conroy met him in the college corridor, and took him aside, to the deep embrasure of a window, with a manner at once confused and mysterious. "Read this," he said, and drew from his pocket the small envelop of a note from her. It announced that she and her mother were staying with the Kimballs, invited him to call, and concluded "If there are any other of our Coulton friends in town, will you please let them know?"

Don read it, refolded it, returned it to its envelop, and gave it back without a word.

Conroy asked timidly: "Did n't she write to you?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Perhaps she did n't know you were here."

"Yes. I think she knew."

His cousin turned the note over, without putting it back in his pocket, in a manner of disowning it, apologetically. "That 's queer."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I thought—Are n't you going to see her?"

"I think so. Yes."

"Are you! When?"

"Whenever you like."

Conroy was obviously relieved. "I 'll call for you on my way over to-night, shall I?"

"Yes . . . if you 're going to-night."

"About half-past eight?"

"That 'll do. Yes."

"You 'll be ready?"

"I 'll try to."

"All right. Half-past eight, sharp."

Don escaped, ashamed of his deception; and Conroy, before he tucked away the letter in his pocket, fingered it a moment, smiling like a flattered young Lothario.

He arrived at Don's boarding-house at eight o'clock, in high spirits, and assumed the leadership of the expedition at once, laughing and talking and straightening his necktie before the mirror and cocking his head on one side to see the "set" of his trouser legs, while he waited for Don to polish a pair of cracked shoes. He was too boyish to have any self-conscious vanity, but he glanced at his watch, patted it back into his pocket, and smoothed his

waistcoat with a pleased and excited air that would have been in an older man the anticipation of a "lady-killer." He was not handsome; his features were too flat. But he was well-dressed and well-built, and he had the assurance of an easy manner. He accented, by contrast, Don's paleness, his angularity, and his student shabbiness; and by an exuberance of spirits he had the effect of increasing, perversely, Don's reserve.

They came, together, to the door of the old, "semi-detached," white-brick house, in which the Kimballs lived. Don let him ring, standing back himself on the edge of the porch to look at the lighted curtains of the window at which she had stood to see him pass on Sunday morning. And when a maid opened the door, Don followed in, under the crimson gas-globe of the hall, as reverently as if he had been entering a church.

Lights and laughter and the music of a piano invaded him with bewilderment almost at once. She parted the hangings of a doorway at his elbow, and greeted Conroy and him with a dazzlingly flushed smile, dressed as he had never seen her before, in a young girl's evening gown with elbow sleeves. She ushered them into a blazing room of gaslights and strange faces, and introduced them to a multitudinous company—of seven persons. Her mother, a small and pretty woman with young eyes, met them—in spite of a hoarse cold—with the bright friendliness that was habitual with her. Mrs. Kimball, without rising, lifted the drooped and puffy eyelids of a strong face,

and acknowledged their bows with the slightest inclination of her head, grey-haired and fine-looking. Three young ladies who were to Don three different arrangements of feminine eyes, nose and mouths, smiled politely and forgot him. A young man with a pince-nez—whom he recognized as an upper student of the university—shook his hand with a manner of condescending, for the moment only, to meet a Freshman as a social equal. Another man, prematurely bald, said deeply "Glad to know you," and then startled him with a limp touch of indifferent fingers which he dropped like a wet fish. He recovered from his embarrassment to find himself sitting beside a girl whom he subsequently discovered to be the younger of Mrs. Kimball's two daughters.

She opened conversation with him, patronizingly, by asking him whether he was a college student, what "year" he was in, and what "course" he was taking; and leaning back in her chair with an unnecessary haughtiness that brought out a striking pose of her neck and head, she regarded him with a cool curiosity in which there was something inimical. He did not understand that she rather shone in her young circle as a girl who questioned the intellectual superiority of men—as evidenced in college students—and who prided herself on discouraging with sarcasms the masculine adoration which her beauty brought her. He replied to her with a divided attention, aware that Conroy and Margaret—for the "Richardson" was still a strange formality to his thought—had gone to the piano together, and that Conroy was preparing

to turn the pages of her music while she played. She was poised on the duet-bench with a slender grace of figure that was heart-shaking. In a strange duality of consciousness, Don bent above her, with Conroy, devotedly, at the same time that he heard Miss Kimball and replied to her.

"I beg your pardon?"

Miss Kimball, after a calculated pause, repeated: "How do you like Professor Cotton?"

But the first notes of the piano, running in a quick melody tenderly, caught and tangled his attention; and after stammering distractedly "I—I don't—" he relapsed into the silence which had fallen on the room; and gazing at the carpet between his feet, he listened to the music, smiling, as if it had been a voice.

He did not know what the composition was, or who had written it; and he was not curious to know. It was magically hers; and it spoke to him of her in the rise and fall of a melody that hung and trembled and rose plaintively above the rocking chords of a flowing bass. It was to him a divine yearning, an almost tearful aspiration; and it raised in him confused thoughts of darkness and love, of mystery and sadness and the unappeasable cry of affection—thoughts that were less thoughts than pensive emotions, vibratory moods that stirred in response to the singing of the instrument and trembled in him till it seemed to him that his very soul thrilled and was shaken.

It faded away in a fluttering and soft appeal of

single notes, and was lost in a polite applause that thanked her with admiring comment. "How well she plays!" "She has such excellent technique, don't you think so?" "My favorite nocturne."

Miss Kimball had been watching the changes of his face. She asked "Do you like Chopin?"

He looked up at the piano, transparently pale, his eyes burning; and he replied—without altogether understanding what she had asked—"I don't . . . know him."

THE whole evening was a repetition in variations of that situation. Although he did not watch Conroy and Margaret, his mind was secretly with them. He listened to Miss Kimball and replied to her without betraying more than a heavy simplicity; and he remained impenetrable to her curiosity in a way that first piqued and then bored her. When she rose and left him, Mrs. Richardson took the chair beside him, and inquired for his aunt and his mother, and tried to rally him with smiles. She had been noticing the way in which Margaret devoted herself to his cousin; she had been feeling some remorse for her summary interdiction of Don's correspondence; and she began to look at him, now, with the sympathy of a mother who sees her daughter playing the coquette. But she was surprised to find him stolidly unruffled; when she caught him with his eyes on Margaret, she could find no trace of jealousy in his look; and she was puzzled, as much as Miss Kimball had been, to see him, more than once, gaze around the room with a sort of won-

dering interest as if he were suddenly curious to hear what they were saying, to watch their expressions and to study their gestures and their clothes. She decided that he had outgrown his boyish love affair, and she was at once relieved and disappointed. She found him rather a stupid youth.

He was, in fact, alternating between the exalted moods to which the music lifted him, and a puzzled return to the consciousness of his surroundings. At one moment, he was alone with Margaret in the gropings and longings of his doubts of life. At another, he was sitting among these curious fellow-humans who seemed to move in a small circle of light surrounded by the mysterious darknesses of their origin and their destiny, talking of nothing, smiling at nothing, and apparently unconscious of anything but what was before their eyes.

When he rose with them to say good-night, they seemed to close in on him and separate him from her; and it was as if across their interference that he reached her hand for a moment and held it while he caught the meaning of her smile. A slight pressure of friendliness seemed to reward him for the evening apart. Then Conroy came between them with a laughing "You 'll not forget?"—and he backed away. Miss Kimball dismissed him with a contemptuous smile that stung him into a startled examination of his conduct toward her; Mrs. Richardson did not say good-night to him at all; and while he was waiting for Conroy on the porch, the two men came out, laughing and talking, and passed him over with a glance.

He woke to the fact that he had been conspicuously dull all the evening; that they looked on him as a silent boor whose acquaintance was not worth acknowledging; that even *she* must be ashamed of him when she compared his conduct with Conroy's. What a clumsy dolt he must have seemed! What an ass he was to behave so!

He hurried down the path to get away from the scene of his disgrace as soon as possible, but Conroy caught up to him at the gate and accompanied him to the street-corner with a reminiscent chuckling of self-satisfaction that was a salt in Don's wounds. When he was alone again, he wandered dispiritedly around the streets, chafing with discomfiture and still so hungry with the unappeased desire to see her and hear her that he could not face the emptiness of his room. He came back to look at the Kimball house, hiding from a street-lamp, behind a tree-trunk, across the road; and he watched the lighted windows darken one by one, newly aware of how she was shut in from him by the conventions of the world, and feeling himself walled out with his dreams, longing and lonely, under the inscrutable cold glitter of the stars.

VII

He was too shy to face the Kimballs again, and she did not invite him to do so; for Miss Kimball had made a household joke of his reply that he did not know

"Mr. Chopin," and the girl was afraid that they might tease her, and make sport of him, if he called to see her. She contrived to meet him, as if accidentally, next morning, in the stream of college students that drew in from all the neighboring streets, at nine o'clock, to the beginning of the day's lectures; and he learned from her that he might find her coming from her music lessons at eleven o'clock on certain mornings and at five o'clock on other afternoons.

For the moment, it was all he wished—the opportunity of having her, if but for ten minutes, alone and out of doors, away from the formality of parlor conversation and the curious eyes of household gossips. With a young lover's instinct, he wished to preserve their intercourse from the touch and soiling of everyday life. And he parted from her on a street corner, without taking her to the gate, glad to see from her manner that she did not wish their meetings to be known.

It was the fresh beginning of one of those strange courtships of young people which appear to the onlooker so amusingly tame. He had suddenly grown humble with her. Compared with his own social awkwardness, she seemed to him discouragingly bright and talented. Sitting in his room of an evening, he pictured her, in the midst of light and company, charming everybody with her piano-playing and accepting their congratulations with an unembarrassed smile. Working at his studies in the college library, worried by the uncertain prospect of his future, she seemed one of those happy aristocrats

of art and leisure whose duty it is to adorn life, to give pleasure, and to be happy that they may make others so. Sullied with his own disbeliefs, he thought of her innocent faith as something sweet and pure. He made her the symbol of all that is in man the substance of hope and the object of aspiration, almost consciously uplifting her so that he might gratify his instinct to look up.

And yet, when he walked with her, he said nothing of such thoughts. He was content, for the present, that she should take an interest in his progress at college, and accept his devoted attentions as a pleasant matter-of-course. He had his future to plan anew, and he did not seem to be able to think at once of any mode of life that would be sufficiently ideal for her to share it. He examined his classmates, walking home with one or another of them at luncheon hour; and he found that a few were, like Conroy, looking forward to succeeding their fathers in some business; that many were to be lawyers, more teachers, and some ministers; but that the majority did not know what they were to be. They were to decide after they had taken their degrees.

Law and the church were equally out of the question for him; and the schoolhouse was even less inviting. He knew nothing of business; and though he consulted the "want columns" of the newspapers, they offered no suggestions. He felt that he might have studied medicine perhaps, or science, if he had begun in time; but it was too late now; he could not turn back a year and start afresh. What he wished

was some way of earning an easy living without making himself the bound slave of business or a profession; for he felt a high contempt for all the money-grubbers and day laborers whom he saw crowding through the streets of the city, as blind as driven animals, in the pursuit of trade or patronage. He resolved that he would find a way to live as free as a boy and as independent as a man, avoiding all ambitious cares or worries, content to enjoy a modest comfort without great luxury, love her, and be happy. Pending his discovery of the necessary means to that end, he perfected his conception of the end itself in his imagination, and spent hours picturing her as she would look when she stood to meet him in the door of their little home at sunset—or when she sat at the piano playing to him of an evening with the lamp-light shining on her hair—or when she poured the breakfast coffee with a dainty turn of wrist and passed the cup to him, smiling beautifully across the roses that were always fresh in a vase on the table, as they were always fresh in her cheeks.

Meanwhile, their walks together were the most adventurous and romantic meetings. One day it was snowing so heavily that she had brought an umbrella, and he held it over her, keeping so close to her that they were almost arm in arm, shut in with her under that small cover by the storm, and smiling at nothing blissfully. Then there was the day when the laces of one of her heavy winter shoes became untied, and he knelt down beside a doorstep to refasten them for her, and she—in order to steady herself while she stood on one foot—put her hand on his shoulder and

bent over him, laughing at his clumsiness because his fingers were cold. And above all, there was the afternoon when she made the excuse, to her mother, that she had to do some shopping down town; and they made their way to the business district along the squalid "back" streets of "The Ward," where the sidewalks were so slippery that on their return, in the gathering darkness, she had to take his arm, twittering gaily, and swinging a long stride to keep step with him, unconscious of the fact that the touch of her hand was burning him through his sleeve.

She no longer had any coquettish timidity in her manner towards him, and he was careful to say nothing that might frighten her into thinking seriously of their relations. The issue of his only declaration of love was still a warning in his mind. He did not speak of the future in which he had included her. When she asked him whether he had decided what study he was going to pursue, in the place of law, he replied easily: "Oh yes. I 'm taking a general course—a 'pass' course, they call it. I can get my degree in that, you know."

"And then what will you do?"

"What Emerson says," he laughed.

"What is that?"

" 'Make yourself necessary to the world and the world will give you bread.' "

She looked at him thoughtfully, struck by the hopeful impracticality of his trust in the advice of books.

"You should read Emerson," he said. "He 's *great.*"

The unworldly philosophy of the mild New Eng-

lander had come to him, only a few days before, like the gospel to a new convert. He had read with glad eyes "You will hear every day the maxims of a low prudence. You will hear that the first duty is to get land and money, place and name. But why should you renounce your right to traverse the star-lit deserts of truth for the premature comforts of an acre, house and barn? Make yourself necessary to the world and mankind will give you bread, and if not store of it, yet such as shall not take away your property in all men's possessions, in all men's affections, in art, in nature and in hope." He had felt that he should take as the motto of his life: "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your mind." He had submitted, in his relations with her, to the command: "Give all to love; obey thy heart. It is a god, knows its own path and the outlets of the sky." In reply to the despondencies of his religious disbeliefs, he had accepted as an inspiration, the high advice: "Seek not the Spirit, if it hide inexorable to thy zeal. Say 'Here am I; here will I abide, forever to myself soothfast; go thou, sweet Heaven, or at thy pleasure stay!' Already Heaven with thee its lot has cast, for only it can absolutely deal." And all this poetical transcendentalism had gone to his head, like a white wine, and he had begun to live on it, intoxicated with enthusiasm, and exalted above the "low prudence" and the small facts of life.

When he learned from her that Conroy was calling to see her frequently in the evenings, he had no

jealousy of his cousin—none even when he heard that she and Miss Kimball had gone to the theater with Conroy, or when he found that Conroy had given her the rose which she wore one morning in her coat.

"He 's a funny boy, is n't he?" she said.

He nodded, admiring her silently.

"He seems to be having—a 'gay' time at college," she went on.

"Yes. That is what he came for."

A moment later, she added: "Mother says so many boys at college learn to—to drink—" She blushed—"and gamble."

He looked up quickly. "But he 's not that sort, is he?"

"That 's what I told mother! She seemed to think—but you 'll look after him, won't you?"

"What has happened?"

"Why, *nothing*! Really nothing," she cried. "It was just that mother spoke of boys doing those things at college. And I knew that you would n't let him do them, if you *knew*. And that 's why I mentioned it—*really*."

"What made your mother speak of it at all?" he asked suspiciously.

"She—she had a brother once, who went to college and—"

"Oh." He thought it over. "No. Con's all right. He 'll take care of himself." He was flattered by her trust in him. "I see him in the halls almost every day."

He did not say that he had been avoiding Conroy,

having refused a half-hearted invitation to go calling with him again. And he was not shrewd enough to see that Conroy had been avoiding *him*. He only envied his cousin's opportunities of hearing her music; and when she told him that her mother, at last, had gone to a southern winter resort for the next two months, he said: "I wish they 'd all go away. I want to hear you play again, and I can't hear you when they 're all—talking."

"I wish they would, too," she replied. "They treat me as if they thought I was a baby that should n't be left alone with anyone for five minutes! They 're speaking, now, of going to the Conversat—without ever asking me whether I should like to go. I suppose mother has been telling them I 'm too young to be going out."

"I suppose."

"Are *you* going?"

He shook his head. "No."

As he was parting from her, she said: "If they all go to the Conversat without me, I 'll just play to you, that night, as much as you like."

He passed the next few days in a prayerful expectation that they would go to the affair without her. They did so; and they were not more than well out of the house, before he rang the bell and heard her open the inside door and call back to the maid: "I 'll go, Maggie."

She received him under the red gas-globe of the outer hall with a mischievous affectation of surprise.

"Why, how do you do? Aren't you going to the Conversat?" And he entered as if he had been Romeo just arrived by way of his rope ladder.

She had been sitting for her photograph on the previous day, and she had put on again the pretty dress which she had worn for the picture. It was cut low and square in the neck, to show a throat that was as round as a bird's, girlishly white and soft, and to him so tenderly beautiful that it took him with a blushing catch of the breath which she saw and smiled at as she had smiled at her reflection in the mirror. She patted the butterfly bow which she had arranged as if it had lighted artlessly on top of her young coiffure, thanking him for his admiration with triumphant eyes. "This is so unexpected!" she said.

"Won't *she* tell?" he whispered.

She understood that he referred to the maid. She set the bow dancing with a spirited shake of her head. "I 'll tell on *her* if she does." When they had passed out of the hall, through the curtains, she explained in a choked undertone: "There 's someone in the kitchen with her. She 's awfully funny. They won't let her have callers. She says they 're a 'lot of old maids'!"

He wiped the melted snow from his eyelashes and his eyebrows, laughing in his handkerchief.

"I did n't dare light all the lights," she went on, under her voice, "for fear the neighbors would see it and say something. Isn't it a joke!" And then with the same gaiety but loudly, fluttering across the

room with a suddenness that bewildered him, she cried: "How do you like my photographs? See!—They 're just the proofs I 'm to choose from."

The single jet of gas above him did not give light enough for him to make them out, and she led him over to the piano-lamp that was glowing secretly under its rose-leaf shade in a far corner. He was smiling when he looked at the first picture; she enjoyed the change of his expression. "Do you like that one?" she asked.

Did he like it! He gazed at it as he would have gazed at her if he could have had her unconscious of his scrutiny and undefended by the distracting challenge of her eyes. She was posed glancing aside, in the shy demureness he most loved in her, her neck turned prettily, her ear showing in its nest of brown hair as round and white and fragile as a little field-bird's egg. After waiting a moment for his answer, she gave him the next picture, almost embarrassed by his devouring silence; and he blinked at the roguish eyes which met his full under level eyebrows with a twinkling gravity as if trying to deny the smile that curled the corners of her mouth. "That 's the one I like," she said, standing beside him to look at it over his arm. "That—and this."

The last was a more formal portrait, a three-quarters view, with the chin up saucily and the expression one of young alertness and sly penetration. "I 've decided on those two—the last two."

He turned back to the first. "May I . . have this, then?"

"But it will fade out, in the light. It 's just a proof."

"I 'll keep it—where it won't."

His tone sent her to the piano, nervously, and she sat down at the keyboard, turning her back. "Well," she said, running up the scale.

He drew a long breath of gratification, and passing his hand over the picture to brush a speck of dust from it, caressingly, he laid it between two letters taken from his inside pocket, and put it away with the warm flush of a girl hiding a love letter in the bosom of her bodice. She had begun to play a light air. He sat down to put his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands; and he remained so, as if the music were a bright stream flowing past him and he were staring at it, full of his thoughts.

It brought him back, at last, to something of her own sparkling mood; and when she had finished it, he said: "I wish I could play like that."

"Come on and try," she laughed, moving aside on the bench.

He hesitated. "Is there room?"

"There should be. It 's for the Misses Kimball's duets."

"Oh." He came awkwardly. She invited him again by gathering in her skirts beside her. He sat down.

"Now. Put your hands *so*. I may have to earn my living this way some day. My first pupil!" And with a severe "One—two! One—two! One—two!" she began the exercises for the first two fingers.

"Knuckles down, sir." She gave them a tap. "Wrists up. Forearms on a level with the keys. Again! One—two! One—two! One—"

"I liked the other things you played, better," he joked.

"There you are!" she said. "They always want 'pieces' right away. One—two! One—two! You must perfect your technique first."

And with a stern pretence of seriousness, that trembled always on the verge of laughter, she put his clumsy fingers through their drill, in a teasing vein of coquetry that made him long to catch her hands and crush them, as one longs to catch up a frisking kitten and cuddle it fiercely.

"Now," she said, "I 'll give you your first piece—'The Blue Alsatian Mountains'."

It was at last too tantalizing to be endured, and he held her hands and said shakily "No. Please play. Play that—'nocturne' was it?—the one you played first that night."

"This one?" She freed her fingers and began it.

"Yes."

He did not leave his seat beside her, and she wove the magic of that melody under his eyes, casting the spell of it on him as softly as a breath perfumed with the fragrance of her garments and warm with the vitality of her abundant young life. He was in the clutch of instincts which he could not understand and which he was afraid to yield to, drawn toward her by a terrible longing but not daring to let himself go because he feared to put all his hopes to a

disastrous test again, prematurely; and above all, he was fighting for his transcendentalism and willfully in awe of his ideal.

He rose from the music bench and began to walk about the room, trying to overcome his agitation. He did not know himself, and he was bewildered by the loss of his self-control. His under-jaw was trembling in his cheek; his throat ached. When she looked at him over her shoulder, with her hands lingering on the last notes, he was so pale and distressed that she cried: "What 's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No, no," he stammered. "I 'm—"

"What is it?" She came over to him. He was standing beside a chair, wiping the moist palm of his hand on his coat sleeve in a fumbling nervousness that alarmed her. She took him by the wrist, to stop him. "What is it?" He put his other arm about her shoulders and drew her to him, his face twitching; and he frightened her so that she stepped back at once, confused, and blushing, and concerned for him.

After a helpless silence, he said "I 'm—all right. . . . I was dizzy." He looked at the chair beside him. "I guess I 'll sit down."

She returned to the piano and began to play again to cover her bewilderment. They passed the rest of the evening with the width of the room between them. And he replied to her with a labored deliberation, pausing in the middle of his sentences to take breath, in a way that reminded her of an amateur singer's faulty "phrasing."

After he had gone, she remained seated there, her hands clasped between her knees, in a girlish attitude of puzzled meditation. When she smiled doubtfully, it was because she recalled his thin fingers on the piano keys and his bony wrists exposed below his coat sleeves by the outstretching of his arms. When she frowned, it was at the recurring thought of his strangeness, his moodiness, his failure to rise to her innocent coquetry and good spirits. When she blushed, blinking uncertainly, it was at the memory of that sudden fluttering of his eyelids and the approach of a caress which she had suspected but which she could not be sure, now, that he had attempted. At last, rising quickly, she took up her photographs, as if to put away from her the thought of this evening that had been such a perplexing failure; and she stood smiling down, with a pleased appreciation, on the camera's reflection of her pretty face.

VIII

THAT began the struggle between his romantic ideals and his natural instincts; and it began a week of constraint and strangeness in his manner toward her; and it ended by making her fear that he was bored by her, that he was no longer interested in her small talk, walking with her through the melting snows or freezing rains of March in a depressing silence that was either absent-minded or worse. She

contrasted the stupidity of these meetings with the gallantry of his cousin's evenings, and she knew that the difference was not in her. And Don, unable to respond to her little coquetries, because he was clinging to the high solemnity of adoration which he brought to her from his solitary thoughts, felt the estrangement between them and worried over it in a silence that increased her discouragement.

When, at the end of the week, she found herself with a cold which kept her from her lesson, she made no effort to let him know that he would not find her coming home at the usual hour. She told herself that if he wished to break with her, it would serve as an excuse; and if he did not, it would bring him to his senses. With a young girl's cruelty, she was willing to punish affection in order to prove it; and she remained in the house, reading her books and practising her music, and noting with a somewhat guilty satisfaction that it was storming on him out of doors.

Don passed and repassed the gate of the Conservatory a dozen times in the half hour that he waited for her, wet to the knees with the cold slant of rain that blew under his umbrella, chilled with loitering and downcast with disappointment. He returned to his room, as miserable as if he had missed his dinner, and sat down in his wet clothes, wondering what had happened to her, and unable to get his mind away from the gap which her absence had left in his day. It was not until he had had his supper and shut himself in with his books, that he regained his usual

cheerfulness in the expectation of seeing her on the morrow; and he went to bed early to escape the shivering dampness of his room and to hasten the arrival of their next meeting by sleeping through as much as possible of the interval.

Although he suffered, next day, with a heavy aching in his back and his legs, he went to intercept her earlier than usual, in the fear that he might have been late on the previous afternoon; and in a piercing wind that pricked him as if with tiny needles of ice through his clothes, he watched for her for an hour, until the horrible certainty that she must be ill and unable to send him word hurried him home in a panic of anxiety, resolved to call and inquire for her that night. By this time his head was aching with the fever of influenza and he was half choked with a sore throat. He gulped his supper, unable to taste it, and hurried out to get Conroy to accompany him to the Kimball house.

It was a dripping black night, foggy and cold, with hidden pools in the crossings and feeble street lamps to see them by. He splashed through them in anxious haste, holding—with a bare hand—his overcoat closed on the aperture of a missing button at the neck. He made a short cut across the college campus through the sodden grass, and came to the Residence wing like the midnight caller for a country doctor in a matter of life and death. He saw a light in Conroy's window as he swung under the arch that opened on the "quadrangle." He heard a shout of songs as he sprang up the stairs

of the "house" in which Conroy lived; and when he came to his cousin's door, he knocked before he understood that the singing was in Conroy's room.

There was a sudden silence, inside. It was followed by a hasty shuffle. In a moment, someone shouted: "Come in!"

He opened the door on a group of students seated at a table, with pipes and cigarettes, in the circle of a lamp-light that was so strong in their eyes they could not see him in the shadow. He stood on the threshold. "Who is it?" Conroy asked, peering against the light.

"It 's—I want to speak to you a minute, Con."

"Oh, it 's you! Come in here, you monk, you old hermit! All right, boys." He put back on the table an ale bottle which he had hidden under his chair, and the others brought out their glasses from between their knees and their playing cards from their pockets. "Come in here and shut the door. Get us another glass, Pittsey. Come in here and shut the door. Come on. Come in here."

Don obeyed from mere irresolution, and his cousin welcomed him with a flushed hilarity which Don, for the moment, attributed to nervousness. "Dry yourself at the fire. Bring another bottle of 'pop,' Pittsey. Whose ante is it?"

Someone replied, contemptuously: "Give me three cards. We 're all in a week ago."

"All right," Conroy went on, unabashed. "Here goes. They 're off in a bunch. Hang your coat on the floor, Don."

But Don, standing before the blaze in the grate, with his back to the table, was facing a smiling photograph of Margaret Richardson on the mantelpiece. It was a picture finished and mounted, and not a mere "proof"; he remembered that, on the afternoon on which he had last seen her, she had said she expected her photographs to come home on the following day; and he understood that Conroy must have seen her since that time. He took down the picture and turned it over to find it dated in her handwriting "March 22." Then she had not been ill.

"Look out there, McLean," one of the boys chaffed. "Gregg 's trying to get away with your girl."

The boy who was named Pittsey—a youth of literary pretensions, in a dressing gown—called out: "Which one? Not the prettiest girl he *ever* kissed!"

Conroy attempted to silence them with a frantic expression of face. They shouted gleefully, scenting game, and prepared to pursue it with all the barbarism natural to the young collegian.

"Don't be shy now, McLean."

"A kiss and a cuddle, was n't it?"

"It 's the girl that plays the piano with one hand while he holds the other. Give him another pint of pop and he 'll tell us all about it again."

Don turned, horrified. Conroy was trying to carry an expression of unconscious innocence, but it broke in a befuddled and foolish smile. "Oh shut up, you clams," he said. "That 's not the girl."

They howled. "See him blush!" "Who 's a liar?" "Did n't you tell us, when you brought in that picture—"

One of the boys rose oratorically. "Gentlemen, this is a question of veracity which, I may say, affects us all. Either the accused did or did not kiss the lady. If he did not, then he is guilty of slander, false witness, breach of truth and attempted oscular embezzlement, and he owes us and the photograph an apology." (In vain Conroy tried to stop him.) "His present manner is the demeanor of guilt. I move that if he did not kiss said maiden lady, he be compelled to go down on his knees before the counterfeit presentment thereof and sing the Doxology."

Conroy attempted to escape, but those nearest caught him before he was free of his chair and forced him down in it and held him there. "Oh, say, fellows," he pleaded, "don't be a lot of d—"—

The others closed in on him, laughing like a circle of savages about a torture. It was evident from their manner that while they accepted Conroy's hospitality, they were accustomed to make him the butt of their sport. "Guilty or not guilty?"

"None of your business," he gasped.

The orator raised his voice. "The prisoner refuses to plead. This is a case for the thirty-third degree as it is administered to Freshmen. Will someone kindly bring a hair-brush. Remove the prisoner's—"

Conroy screamed "Not guilty!"

Then to an accompaniment of uproarious laughter and in a confusion of voices and above a continual scuffling and crowding for place, the examination continued:

"Did you, or did you not, kiss the same and aforesaid maiden lady?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Oh, go to grass."

"On the ear?"

Conroy did not answer. A dozen willing hands attacked the buttons of his waistcoat. "No!" he shouted.

"On the eye?"

"No."

"On the mouth?"

There was no answer. Another attack on his buttons brought out a frantic "Yes!"

The orator reached a "mortar-board" and put it on as if it had been the "black cap" of a hanging judge. "The prisoner is convicted. He has insolently and without warrant impugned the veracity of this august body. He is condemned to be taken from this place to the mantelpiece and there compelled to go down on his knees and imprint a chaste salute upon the lips of the lady's photograph in our united presence. Pittsey, you will hold the photograph."

But the photograph had disappeared, and Donald had gone with it.

He rang the Kimball bell and faced the arrival of the maid in a tense tremble. "May I—Is Miss Richardson in? I have something—a message I wish to give her—if she 's not too ill."

The maid held the door open. "She 's not so sick. Won't you come in?"

He entered the vestibule. "No. I can't wait. I 'm too wet. I 'll stay here. Tell her Gregg—"

She caught the suppressed excitement of his manner, and hurried away without closing the door, alarmed by the prospect of some bad news for the girl, whom she liked.

He remained staring at a tiny stream of water that had trickled from some wet umbrellas in the rack and shone on the linoleum in a pool as red as blood under the light of the crimson gas-globe overhead.

"Why!—Won't you come in?"

He looked up at her slowly and shook his head. "I 've been over with Conroy. They had this picture." He held it out shakily. "They were making fun of it—"

"I don't . . . understand."

His face was drawn in a white mask that showed like a grotesque in the crimson light. His eyes were glittering. He asked hoarsely: "Did he?"

"Did he what?"

"Did he . . . kiss you?"

She turned over the photograph. Then she looked up with a nervous smile that was a faint attempt to return the whole matter to the frivolous light in which she had seen it. "Well, he—I could n't help it. He—We were . . . cutting up."

He turned around without a word and started out the open door.

"Wait!" she said sharply. "I don't understand—Why do you come here with—"

He answered, without lifting his head: "He was boasting of it to a lot of boys. I did n't believe it. I did n't believe you would—do that sort of thing."

"Well!" she cried defiantly. "You tried to do it too!"

"Yes," he said. "I tried to do it too. Good-bye."

She followed him out to the darkness of the porch impetuously, and caught him by the sleeve. "Wait," she said. "You can't—I won't have you come here, like this. What is it? How dare you . . . accuse me! I—"

He was so overwhelmed with the shame of that scene in Conroy's room that he could not argue with her, he could not look at her. He said, in a low, stifled voice: "You should n't have done it. I did n't think you—They made fun of you. He was boasting of it." He shuddered with cold and sickness and misery. "I thought you were—above that."

She flung his arm from her. "Go away!" she choked. "Go away! I 'll never see you—I 'll never speak to you again." He went down the steps. She slammed the door on him. He walked home, stiffly erect, through a cold rain that pelted him with derision and the downfall of his ideals.

It was to him as bitter a disenchantment as personal grossness and infidelity and an open scandal would have been to an older man. He returned to the desecrated solitude of his room—the room that had been the sanctuary of his worship—like a priest to a wrecked and empty altar. Without lighting his lamp, he threw himself on his bed in his clothes, shak-

ing with chills and fever, the pulse beating in his ears, his brain swimming, his mind numb with exhaustion and staggering in the whirl of delirium.

There was the small trickle of blood forming in a pool on the linoleum of the vestibule floor, and he stared at it dully, wondering what she would say when he told her that he had killed his cousin. . . . His father, on the bench, put on a black "mortar-board" solemnly and having condemned him to death, borrowed a match from the grinning jury and struck a light for his pipe. . . From the barred window of his prison, he saw his mother in her invalid chair, with little Mary in her arms and Frankie at her side, going to the execution, his father wheeling her, a picnic basket at her feet; and she looked up at him with a face of grief that set him screaming and sobbing frantically and beating on the floor with his fists. Someone knocked on the door of his cell, and called "Donnie? Donnie?" in Nannie's voice. There was a light in the doorway. He sat up in bed and saw Mrs. Stewart, his boarding-house mistress, with a lamp in her hand, all in white, a shawl over her shoulders, standing at the foot of the bed. He said weakly, "I 'm sick."

The rest was a hurry of women in the room—someone taking off his shoes, a steaming glass at his lips, a mustard plaster on his chest—and in the wan light of the morning a man with a black beard saying: "Nothing much yet. A touch of pneumonia perhaps. Bring me a glass of water. . . One of these every half hour for the next four hours. Two of the others

every hour until further orders. . . La grippe principally. He 'll be all right.''

IX

He lay, for the next few days, dosed with quinine and aconite, his ears ringing, his eyes two balls of pain in his head, his body so sore that he turned himself in bed as carefully as a man just released from the rack. And every aching minute of thought made the situation clearer to him. He had lost her, and he had lost her to Conroy. She had never been more than friendly; the last week had been marked by a growing indifference; she had avoided him, finally, when he went to meet her; and she had received Conroy, had given him her photograph, had allowed him to kiss her, and had turned angrily on *him* when he came to accuse her of it. How dare he accuse her! What right had *he* to accuse her! She would never speak to him, she would never see him, again.

The pang of it was not the ''pang of disprized love''; he had always known that she did not prize his clumsy devotion. And it was not the sting of wounded vanity—which is so large a portion of a rejected lover's smart—for Don was neither an egotist nor a sentimentalist. It was the pain of a boyish despair, of a lost ideal, of a wrecked hope, of a maimed life. He saw himself living blank days, in aimlessness and regret. He knew that he could never recover from the loss of her; he would bear the scar of it

to his lonely grave. He was too old to take root in a new affection. Yes, he was almost twenty, now. It was too late. He was a failure and a castaway in life.

By the time he was convalescent, he was also resigned, though he sat in his room like a life-prisoner in his cell. The familiar walls, in their faded paper streaked with the leak of rains, shut out the world that had persecuted him. He would study here, happy among his books; he would become a university professor, devote his life to learning, and be safe behind grey-stone walls covered with ivy. One room would suffice for him—even a room like this, though it should have a study chair and a desk like his father's and a student's couch, instead of this old oval parlor table, this dining-room chair upholstered in imitation leather and sagging in the seat, and this yellow, boarding-house bed, machine-carved, with a varnish scalded to a milky white where the cleanly housekeeper had used boiling water on it. He would never be happy again, but he would be quiet and contented.

It was in this mood that he received Conroy—sitting with a black bandage over his eyes, for the influenza had weakened them and he was not allowed to use them yet. And Conroy, guiltily silent about the scene in the room at Residence, did not tell him that Margaret had refused to see *him*, too, as a result of that incident; he contented himself with awkward inquiries about Don's departing pains, and left a bag of oranges as a peace offering when he went.

Don ate them stolidly. He had seen enough in his cousin's room to understand that Conroy was wasting himself in dissipations, and doing it with that ridic-

ulous bravado of college boys who take to cards and beer bottles as a schoolboy takes to tobacco. But, after all, that was a part of the life which Conroy had chosen, and it was his own affair. He could fight his own battles. He had her to help him now!

"Well, my young man," the doctor said, "I am leaving you a tonic. Take more exercise with it and less books. You 're not within fifteen pounds of your proper weight, and if I 'm called in here again, I 'll send you home to your parents. The day after to-morrow, if it 's bright, you may go out of doors—and stay out." He tock Don by the shoulders and shook him playfully. "The man who built this room did n't suppose anyone would be fool enough to try to live in it, do you understand?"

Don laughed.

"Well, if your eyes bother you, come and see me. Good-bye."

He passed through the doorway and out of Don's life, as doctors do.

She did not write. When he went out, he did not try to meet her. He returned to his old round of lectures, library studies, solitary walks and lonely evenings. He underlined, in his volume of Emerson's poems, the verse:

> "Though thou loved her as thyself,
> As a self of purer clay,
> Though her parting dims the day,
> Stealing grace from all alive,
> Heartily know
> When half-gods go,
> The gods arrive."

WITH a robustness of spirit which had once charmed his cousin in their younger days, he set his face to a new future and a new ideal. She had been but a "half-god" after all. Perhaps some day, when he was rich in academic honors and professorially wise, he would meet such a woman as he had thought *her* to be—a woman tall and dark and pale whose smile would always be somewhat melancholy and who would see life as the mystery which it was to him. Meanwhile, the year's examinations were approaching, and he knew that he was not prepared to meet them. He drank his bitter tonic and studied doggedly.

He met Conroy in the corridors as often as ever, and saw that the young gentleman's eyes were frequently bloodshot, his color bad and his manner nervous. Coming out of the college grounds, one April morning, he saw Margaret approaching him at a distance, slowly, and he turned back, wincing, and crossed the campus to another gate. He took a volume of Emerson on his walks, and read under the pines, on the side of one of those northeastern ravines which the heavy snows had made impassable to him since the early winter. And lying on his back under the branches, he shut his eyes on the light and projected himself upward past the sun and the stars and the entire universe as he conceived it, till these were all flying far below him, like a cloud of glittering insects, in an unceasing and meaningless whirl; and then he turned himself around suddenly on the void of space, and tried to imagine where all these tiny creatures had flown from, where they would alight, from what eggs they had

been hatched, and in what nest; and finding them afloat without any origin which his imagination could picture—with nothing above them, nothing below them, and on all sides nothing from which they had come or to which they could return—a fear seized him, an almost physical fear of dropping, as if in the darkness of a nightmare, into this unfathomable mystery in the midst of which he lived; and he opened his eyes on the sunlight with a start, his forehead wet with perspiration, taking his breath in a tremor and feeling the round world swimming below him like a great balloon which might, at any moment, burst and fall into the shuddering depths that were below it.

ONE night, late in April, Conroy came into the room, took off his brown derby and his spring overcoat, sat down on the side of the bed and said: "Well, I 've come to stay."

Don looked up at him and closed his text-book. "What do you mean?"

"I 've been put out of Residence."

Don raised the shade of his lamp to get the light on his cousin's face, and then quickly dropped the shadow down over him again. One glimpse of the faltering challenge of that twisted smile was sufficient. He reached his pen-knife and began snapping the blade back and forth against the flat of his thumb.

"The Dean's been after me ever since I went in—and he caught me last night—celebrating Pittsey's birthday—with some of the boys—the sneak! And I told him he was, too," he boasted, "and if he 'd said

much more I 'd 've run him out of the room. You 'd think we were a lot of girls in a boarding-school. What harm is there in a game of cards?"

"You 're not supposed to bring . . . liquor into Residence, are you?"

"And that 's another thing! We 're old enough to take care of ourselves, and we 've as much right to drink what we like as he has. A bottle of champagne is n't going to kill us."

"Have n't you been doing too much of that sort of thing?"

"What sort of thing?"

"Beer, champagne, 'pop' generally."

Conroy stood up. "I did n't come here to be lectured by you, either. If you don't want me here, say so. There are plenty of other rooms."

"Well." Don put down his knife. "You 're old enough to know what you 're doing. I 've said all I intend to say about it . . . If you sleep with me to-night, I suppose we can get the big front room to-morrow."

Conroy seated himself again sulkily, holding an ankle on his knee and frowning at the floor.

Don asked: "What will your father say?"

"He need n't know—unless *you* tell him."

Don passed the insult unanswered; he was thinking of Margaret. Conroy added unexpectedly: "You were quick enough to tell *her*."

"Yes. . . You need n't be afraid. I 'll not tell her."

"A lot I care whether you do or not."

Don took the eyeshade which he had been wearing at work since his illness, and put it on; it covered his face like the peak of a cap drawn down over his eyes. "I only told her because I did n't believe it. If I had supposed it was true, I should n't have troubled myself."

Conroy grunted. "You made a deuce of a lot of trouble out of nothing."

"That 's all the thanks I got for it. . . Where 's your stuff?"

"In my rooms."

Thereafter, they talked perfunctorily about moving their trunks and making their arrangements with Mrs. Stewart; but the tone in which Don had spoken about the "thanks" he had received for his interference in the affair of the photograph, stuck in Conroy's thought; and when they were undressing for bed together, in a more friendly sympathy, he asked suddenly: "When did you see her last?"

Don replied: "I have n't seen her at all."

"Since when?"

"Since that night—with the photograph."

After a silence, Conroy said: "I met her on the street while you were sick, and told her what was the matter with you. I think she asked because she was wondering why you had n't been around to call."

"Well, you were mistaken."

"She asked me again, a few weeks ago—at a public lecture."

Don said, to end the discussion: "She told me, that night, that she 'd never speak to me again."

Conroy laughed. "Oh, I know. She told *me* that, too.

She got over her 'mad' three weeks ago. You ought to go and look her up."

Don blew out the lamp, abruptly, without replying, and came slowly to bed where he lay silent with his thoughts.

But Conroy, moved to confidences in the dark, like a schoolgirl in bed with her room-mate, began to confess himself to his cousin with a sort of tentative frankness that seemed always on the point of ending in the silences which interrupted it, but which broke out afresh after every pause. And behind the halting sentences, Don could see how the son of the merchant, come among these "sports" whom he admired and tried to imitate, had never been accepted by them, because of the home training which had left him ignorant of wines and theatres and low talk of women; how he had toadied to them and spent his money on them, and they had despised him for it; how he had brought liquor to his rooms for them, and helped to drink it in a mean ambition to prove himself as much a man of the world as any of them; how he had even made his boast about the photograph with the same aim, and how they had gleefully betrayed him to his cousin as soon as they saw that the betrayal would humiliate him. "They 're a lot of cads, Don—that gang. You should hear them talk about the girls they know. And they sponge on you for everything, and try to get you drunk. And when you get into trouble they won't stand by you. Pittsey was the best of the whole crowd, and he had n't a good word to say for any of them."

Don listened with a divided mind, trying to repress

the stirring of a hope which would not be still. . . . She had quarrelled with Conroy, too, about the photograph. She had been asking Conroy about *him*. She had been thinking of him all these weeks, and expecting to see him. Perhaps she had come to meet him that morning when he had turned back from her at the college gate. . . . He said to Conroy, smiling absent-mindedly in the darkness: "You 're well out of there anyway. If the Dean does n't write home about it—"

"No, he 'll not do that. He said he would n't. He said he thought I should leave Residence, but that no one need know why. He talked a lot of punky cant—about doing it for my own good. He 's a snivelling codfish anyway. All the boys loathe him."

"Well, we 'd better get a sleep now. Good-night."

"Good-night. . . I 'll get even with him some day."

He was breathing in a heavy stupor of sleep when Don was still lying awake, smiling at the blackness, open-eyed.

X

THE Spring had come early, in a sudden heat of sunlight that steamed the snow off the hillsides and warmed the moist air to the temperature of a hot-house. The grass had greened as if it were in a forcing-bed; the twigs of the trees had flushed and budded miraculously; the birds had come out chirping and fluttering on the lawns, in busy possession of a world which they had seized and settled overnight. And on a ra-

diant holiday afternoon, Don walked with *her* along the road that dipped into his valley on the outskirts of the town, as happy as if he were bringing her to a new Eden.

They had escaped from the cramped seats of a crowded trolley-car, and they came to freedom down the middle of the water-rutted steep road between guardian poplar trees, at a pace that set the loose stones rolling under their feet. It brought back to her cheeks a color that the winter had blanched from them, and to her eyes a sparkle of mischief that had been lacking to the more timid, grave regard with which she had met him since their quarrel. She ran to a boulder that had been bared by the rains, at the road-side, and sprang up on it; and leaning against the wind, she drank in the air and the distance with deep breaths and a long gazing, poised on her little feet with her arms as if floating out beside her, her skirts blown, her ribbons fluttering in her hat; and he watched her, holding his breath on a smile, as if she were a bird which he was afraid was about to fly away. "Is n't it *lovely*!" she thrilled. "The trees —*so* green! Look at the shadows of the clouds on the hill there! Oh!" She clasped her hands. "Where are we going?"

He laughed, guarding the small secret. "Down there—around the turn in the valley—where we can look over the river."

"Is it as pretty as this?"

"Prettier. It 's never been farmed, the sides are too steep."

She stood gazing. "How do you find such places?"

"I look for them."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

She reached for his arm to help her down. "Why are you always alone?"

When she was beside him in the grass, he replied: "Because you 're not always with me."

She gave him her full face with a hesitating smile. "You would tire of me, if I *were*." And when he shook his head, tight-lipped, she cried: "Oh, yes, you would! I tire myself even. Some days I just hate myself. Ask Helen Kimball if you would n't. You should see the way she looks at me sometimes when I 'm talking at the table."

"I met her," he said; and at the thought of Helen Kimball—the stiff, the critical, in her posed assumption of superiority—he smiled tolerantly. "I met her the night I called with Conroy."

"What did you think of her?" (She remembered Miss Kimball's "Mr. Chopin.")

"I did n't think of her at all."

She understood, and she laughed. After a silence, she said: "I 'd love to *roll* down this hill, would n't you?"

"It is n't as smooth as it looks—under the grass."

"Let 's run."

She caught his sleeve gaily and started down the slope, with a constantly increasing speed which he saw at once she would be unable to check. "Don't!" he cried. "Not so fast!"—and tried to hold her back. She tripped and almost fell over a rock. He caught

at a bush, and jerked her to her feet, and swinging her at arm's length he brought her around toward him as they slipped, held her until the bush broke, caught another, and stopped her breathless and frightened on the edge of a sudden steepness, with his arm about her. She clung to him, gasping and choking with excitement.

"You might have hurt yourself."

"Oh dear! Let me—sit down. I—"

He let her down, kneeling beside her. She put her hat up from her forehead and straightened it, panting. "I—"

"Are you all right?"

She leaned back against his support. "I—I wanted to make *you* run," she laughed. "You were so—"

"Was I?" He took her hand and held it against his breast in a passionate apology for his stiffness. "You know I 'm—"

"What have you *done!*" she cried. There was blood on his fingers where the bush had torn them. "You 've cut yourself!"

"It 's nothing. . . I wish it were—anything—for you."

"Don!"

He looked away quickly to hide the loosening which he felt in his lips, the moisture in his eyes. She took out her handkerchief, and wiped his fingers silently. "I 'm not worth it," she said in a low voice of shame. "I 'm—I let Conroy—I—"

"Don't!" he begged. "You *are.* You 're everything—You 're all I have."

He raised her hand, smeared with the blood of his,

and kissed it like a knight. It went tense at the touch of his lips. "Oh, Don!" she whispered, drooping. "Don!"—and in another voice, quickly: "Don! Someone will see us!"

He released her. They returned to the road and went on down the hill, side by side, in the staring sunlight, as silent, as nervous—and he as pale and as bewilderedly happy—as if they were a newly-married couple coming down the aisle of the church from the altar railing.

He made her comfortable under his pine, in a little nook of budded underbrush on the side of a hill overlooking the river; and he sat below her, turned so as to look up at her with the glowing face of a shy young passion. She had taken off her hat, and she leaned back against the tree, flushed and smiling and holding him with a deep gaze that twinkled and softened and beamed on him. They were rediscovering their past; it had become a new wonder to them, since it had led them to this. "Do you remember the little place we had in Coulton?—beside the stream?" she said. "Do you remember the day I found you there?—and you called me 'Miss Margaret'?"

"May I—again? You 've always been 'Miss Margaret'."

"Have I! Of course. Do you like it?"

"Yes." He fondled the name with his voice: "Miss Margaret!"

"What am I to call you?"

"I don't know. You called me 'Don.' "

"But everyone calls you *that.* I want a name of my own, too."

"It does n't sound the same—when *you* say it."

"How do I say it?" She tried it in varying inflections: "Don? *Don.* Don!"

"It 's your voice. It 's so—" He gulped.

"Why, I have n't a pretty voice, do you think?"

"I can hear it when I 'm alone. I can see you, any time, by just closing my eyes."

"Really! Try it now. Close them."

"No." He shook his head, his eyes fastened on her, hungrily. "I want to see you really. I shall be alone again soon enough."

"Why—why are you so much alone?"

"Because I can . . . think of you."

"Don!" she said earnestly. "You must n't do it. I—You—"

"After you went away from Coulton, I was so lonely I used to go to the ravine to meet you and—and here, when I was at college, before you came, I had you all the time." She reached out her hand on the warm impulse of pity, and he took it in both his. "Now I shall have this to remember—the softness."

"Oh, Don, dear," she pleaded, bending down to him. "If I disappoint you! If I—"

He played with her fingers, watching them whiten and dimple. "You never will again. I know you now. You never will."

"But when I go away?"

"You 'll come back."

She caught his wrist and shook it, as if to wake

him from this smiling certainty of happiness. "But if I don't? If I go to New York? Mother has written me that she wants me to spend the winter in New York, studying."

"Well, I 'll go too." He laughed, confidently.

"To New York? What will you do there?"

He did not know. He would find something. If she went abroad—to Germany—he would wait for her to come back. "It 's all right," he said. "Don't worry. I know. I can wait."

She leaned back against her tree again, gazing out over the river at the far shore, as if it were the uncertain future in which he put such trust. When he looked at her, he saw the troubled wrinkle of her forehead, and he said: "Don't—don't think of it that way. Go wherever you like. I can wait. I 'll be busy preparing for you—until you come back."

She said, in a shaken voice: "We 're so young. It 'll be years before we can be together, really. If I meet someone else . . . and don't . . . come back."

"You always have. You always will. If you don't, I 'll know it 's because he is—better. It will always be the same—with me—now, whether you come or not. I 'll always think of you the same."

She could not speak, except through the pressure of her fingers. He answered it with the trust of his eyes. "You 'll not worry about it?"

She shook her head, blinded. "I 'll try," she promised, chokingly. "I 'll try to come back—always—for always."

He held her hand against his cheek. "Thanks," he whispered, in a speechless gratitude.

THAT day was to remain with him, in living memory, as a joy that was not to be forgotten unless he forgot his own identity. It was to become as essentially a part of him as the memory of a vision might be part of the life and religion of a saint. The view of the river shining among the branches, the fallen trees in the underbrush, the yellow sunlight, the green shadows, her face against the brown trunk of the tree, the warm surrender of her hand—the memory of these was to be about him in his future like thoughts of home in exile. They were to give to all women a subtle quality of wood-enchantment, as if they reminded him of nymphs and graces known in some forgotten, far-off golden land. And they were to make the smallest patch of grass and trees poetical to him, love-haunted, at once heart-gladdening and full of painful longings —even though it were only a green square in a great city, noisy with traffic and shabby with the dust from the worn pavements of thronged streets.

And as if he were conscious of the momentous influence of the hour—or perhaps as instinctively as the plant that turns itself to the ripening of the sunlight—he gave himself up to her, without any reserve of his secrets, returning to her the homage of all the dreams which she had inspired, the flowering of the past which she had suddenly made perfect. It marked the change in him from mere dreaming to aggressive idealism. He was no longer afraid of himself or of her, resolved that whatever he believed of her should be made true; and she heard him at first with shame and protestations, with pity, with tenderness, and at last with a humbled gratitude and a secret pledge

to be worthy of such devotion if it were possible—until, like a pair of children under their tree, she leaning against his shoulder, holding hands, they looked out on the future with shining eyes, trusting it with the hope of their hearts.

She was to be a singer, perhaps in grand opera, surely on the concert stage; and he was to keep busy with his books while she was working with her music. They would meet in New York—that London of ambitious young Canadians. He would find something there for him to do; "They have so much money," he said, "they 'll not miss the few thousands I 'll need." He inspired her, for the moment, with some of his confidence, and she tried to trust herself as much as he trusted her. When she fell silent, regretting the loss of girlish irresponsibility and heart-freedom which these plans required of her, feeling her hand held where her inclination was only reluctantly settled, he saw the shadow in her face again, and said: "Don't worry, now. Leave it to me. I 'll make it come true. I always have."

She sighed. "It is n't that. It is n't you. It 's myself I 'm afraid of."

"I know," he said. "I 'll make *you* come true, too."

She smiled doubtfully, watching a cloud that had furled itself across the sun, above the far shore of the river, low on the horizon. How low it was—the sun! "What time is it?" She drew her watch from her belt. "Goodness!" she cried. "It 's nearly six o'clock."

"Oh well," he said. "Who cares?"

She caught up her hat frantically. "It will take us an hour to get back. The Kimballs—"

He came down to realities, troubled by her alarm. "I know a short cut."

"Come! Quick! We must hurry."

He started off confidently on his "short cut"; and she followed, pinning her hat as she went.

THEY lost their way in the green twilight of the woods. It was dusk before they came out upon an unknown road and saw their street-car line. It was almost dark when he left her reluctantly, at the Kimball gate. And when he was sitting at his window, his lamp unlighted—smiling at the sky above the spire of St. Stephen's—Mrs. Kimball was saying to the defiant girl: "Very well. Very well. I 'll write to your mother at once then. I shall no longer be responsible for you, if you do such things. That will do."

XI

ALTHOUGH he had been late for supper, Mrs. Stewart had kept him a plate of potatoes and meat warm in the oven, and he had eaten them without thanking her for the trouble she had taken for him, and without paying any attention to her complaint that Conroy had not yet come to the table. And now, shut in his room, he remembered Conroy only to pity him for having missed

the ecstasy of such days as this; and looking out over the rustling maples that lined the street and reached their topmost branches almost to the level of his window-sill, he watched the stars brightening peacefully in the dark blue of the sky, above the blind roofs of the houses on the slope below him, feeling himself in tune with the joyful order of the universe and pitying the busy absorption of the inmates of those houses, imprisoned under their shingles, ignorant of the happy night that sparkled above them in its eternal calm. He went over the memory of his afternoon, incident by incident, like a miser counting the day's gains; and he only turned from it to thoughts of a future rich with the golden promise of many such days. The moon swung itself up among the horizon clouds, majestically; and it was no longer to him the skull of a dead world, hung in the heavens as a memento mori to this still warm earth and its inhabitants; it was the moon of lovers, the glimmering summer moon, whose light was all poetry and pallid gentleness and quiet thoughts. He rested his chin in his hands and smiled at it like a boy listening to a fairy tale.

It was midnight before he heard Conroy stumbling up the porch steps. He lit his lamp, and began to unlace his shoes, guiltily aware that Conroy would be surprised to find him up so late. It was this thought that made him ask his cousin, as soon as he came in, "Well, what kept you?" When he received no answer, he looked over his shoulder, smiling confusedly, and saw Conroy standing with his hand on the doorknob, swaying.

His hat was broken and crushed down on his eyes. His necktie was awry, his waistcoat torn open. He swung the door shut with a lurch, and grunted "Uh?"

Don stood up and watched him stumble across the room to his cot and sit down on it heavily. "Wha' kep' me, uh?" He tried to hang his hat on the bed post, dropped it on the floor, and laughed feebly. "Nothin' kep' me—stayed. Lossofun. As' the Dean wha' kep' me. As' the Dean." He waved his hand. "Fullows said I was 'fraid t'—t'—throw brick through 's window. Uh? Wha' say?"

Don turned his back, sickened by the sight of that imbecile face, with the glazed eyes and the swollen lips. Conroy mumbled: "You—I'm eck—hic—spelled."

"Expelled!"

"Ever been ek—spelled, uh? Man on each arms 'n legs throw y' over a fence. Lossofun."

It was not until the next morning that Don heard the story from a sick and repentant Conroy. He had won a bet on a Varsity baseball game, and, with his winnings, he had celebrated the victory with Pittsey and some others of the coterie. Pittsey and he had "taken too much." On a "dare" frcm the others, they two had gone back to Residence and thrown stones, in a drunken folly, through the Dean's windows. They had both been caught, the others escaping in the darkness; the Dean had told them that they might consider themselves expelled from the University; and when they had tried to attack him, they had been put out of the college grounds by the beadle and the janitor and the

hired men of the houses. "It was a regular riot," he said weakly, "and those d——d cads, after getting us into it, ran away and left us." He turned on his side with his face to the wall, faint with nausea, and he abandoned himself to a sulky despair, refusing to reply to Don's half-hearted attempts to console him with the hope that the affair might be hushed up, and not even speaking when Don said, "I'm going to see the Dean as soon as I 've had breakfast."

He had small hope of aiding his cousin, but what hope he had was increased by the Dean's attitude of mind. "I should be very sorry," he said frankly, "to see McLean expelled. I understand, as well as you do, that he has been led into these escapades by older boys than he. But I 'm afraid the affair is not in my hands, since it is not a matter of house discipline, your cousin being no longer in Residence. The President already knows of the incident—it was impossible to conceal it—and he will, no doubt, act as he sees fit. I can promise you most willingly, that I shall use my influence to have McLean treated leniently, and I should advise you to see the President yourself."

But the President—in his public office with his secretary—standing before his world as the head of the University, had no such paternal view to take of Conroy's offense. He listened to Don's stammering appeal with a stern face. "The Dean," he said curtly. "No! Such drunken vandalism is a disgrace to the University. I will recommend the expulsion of every student whom I can connect with it." And Don left his hope in that office when he went out.

He returned to his room, intending to advise Conroy that he had better hurry home and throw himself on his father's mercy before the Board could meet to pass sentence upon him; but Conroy had dressed and left the house, and Mrs. Stewart did not know where he had gone. Don waited for him all the afternoon, trying to feel worried and depressed, but unable to do so because of the happy thoughts of Margaret that kept singing in his mind like music. And the sum of his reflections was a sentimental foresight that whatever grief or calamity might fall on him in his future, it would strike him only a glancing blow so long as he had her affection to fortify him.

At five o'clock, he went to meet her, hastening through the mild sunlight with a rising spirit; and he greeted her with a smile which he concealed hypocritically when he saw her expression. He thought that she had heard the bad news of Conroy.

She said, abruptly: "Mrs. Kimball has written to mother." And standing on the street corner, digging the ferule of her parasol into the grass of the "boulevard," she told him of the scene of the previous evening, how Mrs. Kimball had scolded her, how she had defied the woman, how the daughters had taken part with their mother against her, and how, finally, they had written to Mrs. Richardson, refusing to have in *their* house "any girl who would go unchaperoned into the woods with a Varsity student and remain there until after nightfall." She was still defiant, still unrepentant. "I 've written, too," she said, "but I know mother 'll not understand. If she does n't come up

here to take me away, she 'll write for me to go to her."

"And leave your music?" He had been counting on another month of meetings at the least, to bring her so near to him that she would never be able to go free and forgetful of him again.

"The term is practically over now. There 's nothing left but the examinations. I 'm not taking them." When she looked up at him, she cried: "Well, it 's your *own* fault! Why did n't you see what time it was?"

He had no thought of defending himself. He was dumb on the edge of the gulf of years—the three years of his college course at the very least—which separated him from New York and the hope of winning her.

His helplessness irritated her; he had been so confident of his plans, under the pine, that she had believed he would see some way of writing to her mother and defending her. "What are you going to do?"

He took out his watch and looked at it dazedly, shaking his head in answer to her question; for it was as if the stroke of the disaster had broken the continuity of his life; and with his future suddenly gone from him, he tried to pick up the broken strands that were left, and found himself wondering simply what day of the week it was and what day the morrow would be.

The sight of her tears brought him to himself. He said hoarsely: "Don't. Don't. I'll fix it. I'll do something. Give me time—to think. It is n't any worse than it was the day I got your mother's letter." He turned her quickly into a side street, talking at random in his attempts to reassure her and almost in tears himself. "It will all come out all right. I'll think of

something. Your mother—See the way she came around about the letter. She did n't forbid you to let me call—or anything. Look! Here are some people coming. Don't let them see you—"

She put up her parasol and screened her face from the passersby. He went the rest of the way in a miserable silence, she holding the parasol down against him too. When he left her at the gate, he pleaded: "I'll know to-morrow. I 'll meet you—there. Don't—"

She cut him short with a blind gesture of dismissal. She could not tell him that she had been crying with anger and self-pity because of the insolence of the Kimballs, and with disappointment because he had not thought of any way to defend her from them. She went indoors without a backward glance at him.

He began an interminable walk that led him in circles of thought, around and around, to no plan, to no conclusion, to no hope. She was going to leave him, for three years at least. There was nothing he could do, nothing he could say, to prevent it. She was going to leave him. And would she be waiting for him on the other side of that desert of separation? He was tormented by the fear that she might not. She was going to leave him. And suddenly he felt desperate, in revolt against the fate that was persecuting him, ready to do anything that would break this tyranny of circumstances and set him free to model his life to his desire.

He did not return to the boarding-house for supper, and when he did return he found Conroy and his friend Pittsey, evidently waiting for him, in the room.

"Hello!" they greeted his despondence. "What does His Holiness say?"

He sat down, wearily, to tell them of his interviews with "His Holiness"—as they called the Dean—and with the President, whom Pittsey referred to as "Old Skeesicks." And he concluded, in a hopeless resignation that was more for himself than Conroy: "You 'd better go home and tell your father, before the Board meets. You 'd better not let him hear the first of it from them."

"Not on your life!" Conroy replied. "*I'm* not going home."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get out of reach, until this blows over." He looked at Pittsey as if referring the leadership in their plans to him; and Pittsey, having emptied his lungs of cigarette smoke, explained: "We 're going to New York."

Don stared, incredulously. Pittsey, with his hat on the back of his head, his chair tilted, smiled an amused challenge to his amazement.

"New— But—but what are you going to *do?*"

Conroy replied recklessly: "Oh we 'll find something, I guess. Pittsey is going into newspaper work. He has a brother there. I have enough money to keep me for a month or two—till the governor comes around again."

Don cried: "But supposing he does n't come round!"

"Well, Great Scott!" Conroy said, "I 'm not a three-year-old, and I 'm sick of being treated as if I were.

This government kindergarten business makes me tired. What 's the use of hanging around here for four years? You don't learn anything that 'll ever be any good to you. We 'll have to strike out for ourselves sometime, and we might as well face it now as any other day!"

Don looked from one to the other, silenced.

"You 'll never learn to swim until you go into the water," Pittsey put in airily. He reached a text-book that was lying on Don's table, and began to turn over the leaves. Conroy smoked feverishly. It was evident to Don that their minds were made up. He looked at them almost with envy. They were going to do what he would, too—if he dared.

Then Pittsey, tossing the book back on the table with a gesture of decision, said: "Expelled? We 'll expel *them!* The pompous flat-heads with their machine-made college education, we 'll expel them out of our lives. Eh, Mac?" And without bitterness, as if the whole affair were a lark to him, alert and self-assured, he began to make fun of the college, the professors, the lectures, the students, the country—everything that they were leaving; and Conroy listened, fascinated, smiling when Pittsey smiled and agreeing with everything in resolute nods, his teeth bitten into his pipe. "What 's the use of staying here?" Pittsey demanded, his close-set black eyes sparkling on Don's gloomy abstraction. "Everything 's scaled to the wage of a dollar a day. They keep their savings in an old sock. A fellow never gets an increase in salary until he gets married; and then they raise him every time his wife has a baby. As for literature!" He flicked

his cigarette ashes on the floor. "They don't charge you anything for printing your stuff—unless you want to bring out a book. You have to pay for a book. There's money in writing school readers, I understand—and City Directories. If they want anything to read after they leave school, they buy a set of Dickens or Thackeray, and enjoy the latest thing in literature. I 'd sooner write ads for a New York department store on a salary of three thousand a year."

Don heard him without heeding him. . . They were going to New York! At one stroke they were setting themselves free! He crossed his knees to hide a trembling that took him in the legs, standing on the verge of a resolution, afraid of the leap. . . At a pause in Pittsey's babble, he asked Conroy: "When are you going?"

"I 'm waiting for my month's check from the governor. It ought to be here Monday. Why?"

Both Pittsey and he saw something in Don's face. They watched him in a puzzled silence. He blinked and swallowed like a boy about to make his first dive. "Well," he said, pale, "I may go with you."

"What!"

"Wha-a-at!!"

"I 've been thinking of it for some time. . . I 'll never pass these exams. . . I've been saving every cent I could. . . I had a quarrel with my father at Christmas—about not studying law—" He gulped on his secret, with an expression of beseeching them not to press him for the whole truth.

Pittsey came to his relief with a shrill laugh.

"Cæsar's ghost!" he cried. "The three of us. Let's eat on it. Come on. It's my treat. Come on. Have a feed on me at Durkin's." Conroy was staring at his cousin, over the pipe which he held, forgotten, at his lips. "Eh, Mac?" Pittsey prodded him.

Don smiled tremulously at Conroy, and said "*I—I'm* hungry enough."

"Come *on,* then!"

XII

THEY went; and they made their plans together, over beefsteak and potatoes, as daringly as three musketeers of romance conspiring to overturn a dynasty with their rapiers. They returned, through the quiet streets, in a line abreast, all keyed up to Pittsey's high spirits, swaggering and talking as freely as if they were irresponsible young tourists in a foreign land—as indeed they seemed to Don, when he looked around at the shops and the houses that watched him with such an alien impassiveness as he paraded by. Pittsey left them at Mrs. Stewart's door, and went off whistling martially; but his spirit presided over the flushed council which Don and Conroy kept in session until two o'clock on Sunday morning, perfecting their plans in detail, counting their money and encouraging their hopes.

In pursuance of those plans, Don, the next day, wrote to his mother that, after all, his father had been right; that he felt he would be better at work; that Conroy—as she would probably hear from the McLeans—

had gotten into trouble at the University and was leaving for New York in a few days; and that *he* had decided to accompany his cousin.

They would be better together. They had saved enough money to keep them until they could find something to do. He was sorry that this would prevent him from spending his summer holiday in Coulton, but if all went well—as he was sure it would—he could be home for a happy Christmas.

"Frank can take my place at the University," he concluded. "His success will make up with father for my failure. I intend to do better where I am going. I will think of you and write to you every day. Address me, for the present, at the General Post Office, New York City."

He did not add any messages of affection; he felt that in his present mood, they would be hypocritical.

He wrote to his aunt that Conroy—as she would probably hear from Conroy himself—was leaving the University on account of a breach of college discipline for which he had been blamed although he was by no means the ringleader in it; that he, himself, had decided he could not afford to waste three years more on his education; and that they were going to make a start together in New York.

No doubt it would seem very foolish to her, but Conroy was afraid to go home and face Uncle John. For his own part, he had quarrelled with *his* father at Christmas, about refusing to study law, and in order to avoid further trouble he was taking his affairs into his own hands. They were both well supplied with money;

she need not worry about *that*. He owed most of his to her, but he was going to earn now, and he hoped to be able to repay her—although, of course, he could never repay her for her kindness.

She was not to worry about Conroy. Everything would come out all right. They would look after each other. They had plenty of money.

And then, finding that he was repeating himself and arriving no nearer an end, he subscribed himself, abruptly, "Your affectionate nephew," and was done.

He addressed his envelopes with a heavy apprehension of the grief and anxiety which they would bring to Coulton; but he consoled himself, in the hopefulness of youth, with the assurance that grief was a passing accident of life which would be forgotten in the rosy future to follow. He saw himself returning with Conroy to Coulton, for their Christmas holiday, with money in their pockets and success in their smiles; and he felt that the joy of such a reunion would more than compensate for the partings which were necessary to make it possible.

He spent his afternoon erasing his name from his college texts so that he might sell them second-hand, tearing up his note-books and papers, and packing his trunk. He underlined, in Emerson's Essays, the sentence: "One of the benefits of a college education is to show the boy its little avail." He put the proof of Margaret's photograph between the first pages of the Essay on Love, tied up the volume with a shoe-string, and hid it in the bottom of his trunk beside the bible which his mother had given him at Christmas. And

he carried himself, through all these preparations, with the air of a man who has taken his decision and is resolved to act on it without further thought.

CONROY'S check came in the morning mail. And they were ready—all but Pittsey. He was waiting for word from his brother, who, it seemed, was an actor of uncertain address, generally written to "in care" of a dramatic paper because he was more often "on the road" than in New York. Pittsey had mailed his letter Saturday morning; he should have a reply on Tuesday; in any case they would wait no later than Tuesday morning. Conroy hurried to the bank to cash his check, and Don accompanied him part of the way, going to sell his books to a second-hand dealer. They agreed to meet again at the railroad offices to buy their tickets.

But the first dealer to whom Don offered his volumes, haggled interminably over the purchase, offering so little for them that Don refused to sell them and carried them to a second dealer who would give less than the first. They were finally sold at such a loss that Don felt too poor to pay his street-car fare to the ticket office, and he walked, ruefully fingering the few silver coins in the pocket of his trousers and despising the commercial world that made second-hand book-dealers what they were. Half way to their rendezvous, Conroy hailed him from the rear platform of a passing street-car, beckoning him warningly to turn back, his face as ghastly as if he were waving a red flag to save a railway train from destruction. Don ran after the car, alarmed, and saw Conroy alighting at a street corner.

They met in the middle of a block. Conroy drew him into a doorway.

"They—they would n't dash it," he gasped. "He telegraphed them to stop payment. He must know. They must have written—from the University. He 'll be coming himself. What 'll I do?"

Don wiped his forehead; the walking and the running had made him hot, and this new catastrophe brought the perspiration out on him like a fear. "I can buy the tickets," he said faintly. "You 'd better go and stay with Pittsey. He 'll not find you there."

"What 'll we do?"

"What? Why, we 'll go to New York, I suppose. There is n't anything else to do now."

"He 'll follow us."

"Well, if he can't find you here, how will he—I don't know. Ask Pittsey. Go and ask Pittsey." He disliked the part of a plotter.

Conroy saw himself cast off, like a drowning man, to his own frantic struggles. "You—you won 't leave me?" he faltered.

Don asked plaintively: "Why should I leave you? I 'll see you to-night. Stay with Pittsey." He found himself looking to Pittsey's high spirits as an intoxicant against depression. He added guiltily as he helped Conroy aboard another car: "I 'll hide your things under your bed—in case he comes."

He came.

And he must have come hard on the heels of his telegram, for he arrived at the boarding house soon after midday, and mounted heavily to the boys' room after

a gruff "I 'll find them" addressed to Mrs. Stewart at the foot of the stairs. He filled the doorway like a huge and angry obstruction to their plans. "Where is he?" he demanded.

Don answered, at bay: "He 's not here. He 's out."

"What 's he been doing?"

Don stammered a confused explanation of Conroy's misbehavior, apologetically. Mr. McLean heard him through with a worried glare, blocking the door. "Why did n't you write and tell me what was going on?"

"I did n't know. He did n't let me know. He left me here when he went into Residence. I could n't afford—"

Mr. McLean tossed his hat on the bed, and sat down in a chair that received him creakingly. "He 's had too much money," he summed it up. His bulky shoulders sank down on him in a way that gave him an appearance of stricken weariness, and though he kept his eyes fixed on Don it was with a blank gaze that did not seem to see the boy. "Things have been made too easy for him." He fingered his beard, and plucked it impatiently, frowning. "Should have looked after him."

"He—he 's all right," Don tried to console him. "It was n't his fault. The boys' he got in with—they led him on to it."

"Does he say what he 's going to do?"

"Well"—Don drew a long breath—"I 'm leaving college. I quarrelled with father about studying law. I 'm going to New York with a friend who knows the city and Conroy wants to go with me. We 'll find something to do there—some work. We 're wasting our

time here. I think it 'll be a good thing for him. We 'll not have enough money to more than pay board."

His uncle had focussed a surprised stare on him. "What *sort* of work?"

"Why, anything we can find."

Mr. McLean made a mouth and shook his head. "New York!" he said. "Ten thousand people are looking for work in New York. Where is he? I'll take him home with me."

"I'm afraid he won't go, sir," Don replied with a sudden daring. "He 's afraid—and I guess he 's ashamed. He knew you were coming; they refused payment on his check at the bank. He would n't come back here with me for fear you'd find him."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know."

Mr. McLean shifted irritably in his chair. "Wants to run away, does he?"

"He 's—he 's not—He has n't been doing anything very wrong," Don pleaded, "except the drinking, and that—he 's been led into *that*."

Mr. McLean did not listen. He took a cigar from an upper pocket of his waistcoat, struck a match and puckered his eyes on the smoke. "Huh!" he grunted over his thoughts. He began to scrutinize Don meditatively, and the boy looked away. It was evident that a decision was coming out of the silence. Don did not speak.

His uncle asked: "Do you know what it is to earn your own living—away from home?"

"No."

"No. Neither does he." He relapsed into thought again.

Don waited.

"Do you know what it is to be on the streets without enough to eat? No." He chewed his cigar. He grumbled: "It would n't hurt him to learn." He shook his head. He muttered, in his beard: "Boys nowadays—Huh!"

Suddenly he asked: "How much money have you?"

"I have a hundred and fifty-seven dollars. And Connias a little—I don't know how much—twenty-some dollars."

He smoked. "Will you look after him?"

"Yes."

After another interval of communion with his cigar, he demanded: "Will you write to me?"

"Yes."

"Will you promise not to write to me for money for him unless he has n't enough to buy food?"

"I 'll promise not to write to you for money at all."

"No, you won't. I don't want that. I want him to have to work, but I don't want him to have to starve. . . And you 're not to let him know that I 'm sending you money for him, do you understand?"

"I 'll not let him know anything about it unless you wish me to."

"Don't let him know that I 'm sending him money—that's all."

"Aunt Jane," Don hinted. "Is she to know?"

Mr. McLean looked at him with an amused appreciation of his opinion of Aunt Jane's ability to keep a

secret. "No one 's to know but you and me. No one, now, understand?"

Don understood.

Mr. McLean reflected slowly.—"Now look here," he said, "I could take him home and put him to work, but I don't want to make a whipped cur of him. And I don't want to treat him the way the old people treated me. I want him to find his feet—if he can. And I want you to help him."

"Yes, sir. I understand."

"When are you going?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow, eh? What does your father say?"

"I don't know. I have n't heard from him yet."

"Running away, too, are you?" He stretched out his thick leg with a chuckle and went down in his pocket for a roll of bills. He took off several for himself and held out the remainder to Don, with his cigar fuming in his mouth and his eyes closed against the bite of smoke that drifted into them. "Here."

"I don't need that, sir." Don said. "I have enough. Aunt Jane has been—"

"Here!" he choked, one hand in his pocket, the other filled with bills.

Don took them from him to relieve him. He removed his cigar from below his nose, caught his breath, and said: "Twenty dollars won't see him far." He reached for his hat. "They 'll teach you something about money before you 're there long."

Don smiled crookedly over his embarrassment of riches.

"It 's time you learned. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, sir," Don said gratefully. When his uncle was in the doorway again, he remembered to ask: "What 'll I tell him—Conroy? He 'll know you 've been here."

"Tell him?" Mr. McLean answered savagely. "Tell him I think it 'll do him good to go down to New York and get some sense bumped into him. Tell him we 'll say no more about it if he comes back to me at Christmas with some honest wages in his pocket. Tell him I hope he 'll learn what it is to have a good home and everything provided for him. That 's what you 'll tell him—and it's true. . . If it isn't too late," he added, in another voice, "we 'll make a man of him yet."

Don heard him stumping down the stairs. When he heard the front door shut with a slam, he turned over the roll of bills, and grinning fiercely he reached his arms up over his head, menacing the ceiling with the triumphant defiance of a prisoner who cries out insults on the walls of the dungeon he is about to leave.

He ran out, with the news, to find Conroy and Pittsey; and Conroy received it with a doleful relief that failed to see why Don was so elated. The rest of the afternoon was taken up with paying Mrs. Stewart, moving baggage and buying tickets, for they were to start on the early morning train. It was not until after supper that Don was free to call on "Miss Margaret," whom he had not seen since Saturday. "No, I can't come in," he told the maid, warned by the lights that

the Kimballs were in the parlor. "Tell her I 'll only keep her a moment."

He saw her come downstairs, as if from the isolation of her bedroom. He held out his hand to her from the threshold. He said, in a rush: "I 've come to say good-bye. I 'm starting, in the morning, for New York —with Conroy. We 're leaving college. If you write to us at the General Post Office, New York—or if you 're there—to send me your address. We leave to-morrow morning."

She cried, under her breath, "You 're not!"

He smiled at her reassuringly, feeling the startled grip of her fingers but unable to see her face because she had her back to the dim light. "Our baggage is at the station."

She backed him out on the porch and shut the door behind her. "You 're not! You must n't! It 's—Why! What are you doing!"

He laughed. "I was only wasting time here. I told you I'd make things come out right.

"*Right!*"

"I could n't wait three years to begin. I want to be at work. I want to be nearer the—together—*you.*"

She dropped his hand as if it had stung her. "*Don!*" It was all she could say, but the tone was eloquent of emotions which he had not expected. He waited, stiff. She went on, with a shudder in her voice: "Oh, you must n't. I 'm not—I 'm not sure. . . of myself. I did n't mean to. I thought—Oh!" And she began to sob.

He put on his hat. He opened his mouth to get his

breath! He found himself hoping insanely that he would not have to speak, because his throat was trembling and his lips were sticking to his teeth. He heard her, at a distance from him, weeping in a vast hush that had settled down on him like the peace that broods over ruins in a desert, among sands, at night.

She was saying: "You promised—You said you'd wait. I told you—I told you I'd *try*. I didn't know—How could I? I didn't mean—I—I thought we'd be good friends . . . and write. I—I 'm not ready yet. I don't want to think of—of marrying any one yet. I want to be free."

He was conscious only of the need of getting away somewhere, alone. He stumbled to the edge of the porch. At a cry from her, he stopped there. She came to him in the darkness and pleaded: "Don't! Don't! Don't do it. Don't leave college."

"It 's too late," he said hoarsely, and gathering her into his arms, with a sort of despairing longing for what might have been, he found her wet cheek with his lips, and kissed her. "Good-bye," he whispered. "Don't cry. It 's all right. I can stand it. I 'm used to it. I can wait."

She released herself with a sudden effort and disappeared into the house.

He returned to his room, fighting with himself to maintain his resolution to endure this disappointment too, to wait for her, to work for her, to be true to her in spite of her. But even while he was saying to himself "I can wait! I can wait!" another voice was asking

him whether it was worth waiting for, whether this belauded love was not all vanity and vexation, whether there could be anything divine in a sentiment which had brought him nothing but disappointment after disappointment, whether he was not playing the fool to his hopes and living in a delusion and building his future on another make-believe. He sat down at his bare table in a room which held nothing of his, now, but his packed valise; and overcome by the desolation of the moment that stood empty between his past and his future, he struggled against the tears that choked him, clinging to his ideals, repeating blindly "I can wait! I can wait!"

PART III

THE IDEALIST

PITTSEY "knew the ropes," as he expressed it. He knew where to find cheap lodgings in New York, and he knew enough not to remain in them. "We don't board," he said. "Oh, no! Not in New York! We camp. Wait till I show you. We rent a flat at twenty dollars a month. We furnish it for twenty dollars more. We do our own cooking on a gas stove that goes with the flat. Wait till I show you! I have n't been camp cook for nothing. Porridge and boiled eggs and coffee for breakfast. Delicatessen and stewed prunes for luncheon. Beefsteak and boiled potatoes and tea for dinner. Wait till I show you! I 've been here before, many 's the time, many 's the time. As Napoleon did n't say: 'The man who storms New York, conquers on his commissariat!' Leave it to me."

They left it to him. He foraged for them at the stations on their way down, refusing to let them pay dining-car prices for their meals. He conducted them across the New Jersey ferry, pointing out the high buildings that loomed mountainously above the New York shore, under a sky that was pale with the reflected glare of hidden street lights. He led them to a fly-blown restaurant and fed them on corned-beef hash "browned in the pan," coffee and "wheats." He found them a cheap hotel where they left their

valises, in a bedroom that smelled like the inside of a rusty stove. ("Good enough," he said. "The proprietor says it 'ain't been slep' in' since his wife died in it.") He piloted them across town to the lights of "the Rialto," and went through the crowds with his hat on the back of his head, laughing and talking like a city boy taking his gaping country cousins around the "fair." And he gave to the expedition an air of adventurous dare-deviltry, of youthful self-sufficiency and hope, that kept Don and Conroy in a continual flutter of excitement despite the bewilderment of their strange surroundings that would, otherwise, have disheartened them.

To Donald, indeed, the day had been like one of those wild dreams in which disconnected scenes without locality and incidents without consequence follow past in an untiring vividness, each snap-shotted by itself with the distinctness of an isolated experience and each snatched away to give place, in a flash, to the next. And this was true not only of the railway journey—with its fields and houses, fences and roads, whipping past his window, like the telegraph poles, in kaleidoscopic monotony; it was true also of the city which he approached across a Dantesque black water in which the lights of the ferry-boat reeled weirdly on the swells that rose out of a darkness and engulfed them—a mediæval city, apparently built on a hill, window above blazing window, its edge supported in the water on slimed piles and its towers mysteriously dark against a wan sky without a star.

He went to bed, that night, amid uneasy millions

of strange peoples, on a continent of crowded houses and stone streets that was barren of grass and trees or the soil in which they could take root or the natural light to grow them. He saw Margaret and the University and the life he had lived, as far from him as Penelope and Ithaca were from the Grecian wanderer of the school books when he looked back at the memory of his home from the lurid half-light of Hades. He fell asleep, construing to the clackety-clack of the car wheels of his railway ride: "Then answering him—*prosephē polumētis Odusseus*—'O King Alcinous—*pantōn arideikete laðn*—truly it is a beautiful thing—truly it is a beautiful thing—" . . . Dexter barked. He looked up from his book to see a girl coming toward him through the trees.

He woke to a sunshine which made him feel that, at least, he was still in the old familiar world, though in such a bewilderingly new part of it; and he woke to find Pittsey already planning their housekeeping with an almost "bridal enthusiasm," as he himself said.

That enthusiasm carried them through the remainder of the week undepressed by the size of the city which they had undertaken to carry by assault. It found them three rooms on the top floor of an old brownstone house that had once been a family residence, in one of those streets leading into Fifth Avenue which have long since been overtaken by the encroachments of the business district. A barber had the basement. A publisher of cheap music occupied the ground floor.

Modistes and milliners crowded the second story. At the rear of the top floor, there were two rooms, lit with skylights—and a dark kitchen the size of a pantry—to be had for $24 a month. These had once been studios, but the whole house had fallen into disrepair, its artistic tenants had abandoned it, and the owner was holding it and its neighbors for sale to any speculator who might wish to pull it down and put a modern office building on the site. He let the boys have the "top floor rear" on condition that they agree to accept two weeks' notice to leave at any moment. "Three times eight are twenty-four," Pittsey calculated. "It suits us to the fraction of a cent."

"The rooms are not very large," Conroy said doubtfully.

"They 're not large enough for exercise, that 's certain," Pittsey replied. "But they build them small in New York to leave more room for exercise out of doors." And the joke served to carry them over a doleful examination of their poverty-stricken apartment

The stairs, as they went down, were bare as far as the next landing. Below, they were slippery with a worn linoleum. The last flight was more prosperously covered with a new cocoa matting. "It looks like the gradual reappearance of vegetation in a descent of the Alps," Pittsey laughed. They had to laugh with him.

They swept up the plaster of a fallen ceiling in the rear room, mopped the uneven floor, and scraped the dirt from the windows until Pittsey stopped them. "Be economical," he said. "If you take that stuff

off, we 'll have to buy blinds.") They shopped together in department stores and the "emporiums" of second-hand furniture, buying three camp cots for $1.87 each, a dining-room table for $3.00, four kitchen chairs—"one for company"—at 75 cents each, cotton blankets, excelsior mattresses, cotton-batting comfortables, blue china dishes, knives and forks with wooden handles, kitchen utensils of tin, some hanging shelves for their library and a blank book for keeping accounts "on a basis of three." They celebrated their house-warming with a dinner of potatoes boiled in their "jackets," steak served in the pan in which it had been fried, fresh bread and a pat of butter in the grocer's wooden dish. They ate from a spread of newspapers in lieu of a table-cloth. And they laughed so heartily at Pittsey's foolery that he had to warn them to be careful. ("Don't raise the roof. More of that ceiling will be coming down on us.")

It was not until Conroy lit his pipe that the subject in the background of all their thoughts was brought out into the conversation. "Well," he said, "to-morrow we start to look for work. What are you going to do, Pitt?"

"Me? I 'm going to start a newspaper article for a Saturday 'supplement' on Camping Out in New York City. How about you?"

Conroy reddened. "I think I know enough about the governor's business to be able to get something all right. What are you going to do, Don?"

Don answered, truthfully: "I don't know. I have n't decided yet."

The fact of the matter was that his knowledge of

the working world was so vague and his qualifications for any position in it so uncertain that a decision was impossible. There was plenty of work to be had; that was evident from the number of advertisements of "Help Wanted—Male" in the morning papers. He had made secret notes of several possibilities: a business "concern" needed a man to manage a shop, "experience unnecessary," salary "to begin" $20 a week; a large wholesale firm needed a man of education to act as secretary, salary $25 a week; a dozen employment agencies on Sixth Avenue advertised, in chalk, on blackboards beside their doors, for household servants, clerks and stenographers, hotel help and private secretaries. He shrank from the personal servitude which most of these vacancies required; he hoped to find some man of large affairs, like his uncle, who needed an honest and faithful young deputy to attend to the minor details of business management which the head of the house might be unable to oversee personally. He was assured of one thing: no matter what his need, he would accept no position in which Margaret could be ashamed to find him.

All his thoughts of her had some such tinge of defensive bitterness. He would work out his own salvation, unassisted by the encouragement which he had hoped to have from her. He would see to it that she should have no cause to be glad of her desertion of him. He would work for her and wait for her, but he would never tell her so, again.

"Well," Pittsey said, "let 's see where we stand." He cleared a place on the table for the account book

and added up their expenditures. Their furnishing had cost them $12 each; the supply of food in their larder, $3.10; their month's rent, $8 each; their deposit to the gas company, $5; tips and sundries, $1.25. "There you are! For less than twenty-five dollars each, we 're set up for life—rent paid for a month and money out at interest with the gas company. And unless we get gold-bricked we can live, now, for $3 a week each.... eh?" he crowed. "How 's yon for management?"

Don was making a rapid calculation that he had enough money of his own to keep him for six months at least. Conroy had laid a ten-dollar bill beside his plate and was searching his pockets for more. "What the dickens," he muttered in his pipe. "I must have lost—"

Pittsey enjoyed the situation. "I know! I know the feeling. Where did it go, eh? Where did it go? Refrain: 'But what has become of last year's snow?' I 'll write a ballad for one of the weekly comics on it." He made a note on the back of an envelope from his pocket.

"That 's all right, Con," Donald put in. "I 'll carry your proportion until you get things going."

They repaid Pittsey what he had expended for them. He accepted it jocularly. "Now, I 'm the chef, you know," he said, "but you two have to wash up. Get to work. We 're going out to see the sights of a great city, as soon as you 've finished."

"You go, Don," Conroy said. "I 'll clean up here." They looked at him, surprised. He had an expression

of nervous despondence. "I 'm tired," he explained, hastily. "I 'd sooner go to bed early."

And Don understood that the fear of the city, against which he himself had been fighting, had found Conroy the weaker in spite of his greater physical strength.

Don went out alone in the morning—Conroy excusing himself with the plea that he had some letters to write—and he proceeded first to the address of a mining company that had advertised for an educated young man to do desk work. It was a glorious May morning, warm with sunlight and cool with a light breeze; and the crowded pavements were noisy with a joyful activity that seemed to move to the gay tunes of street pianos, as inspiringly as an army on the march. That immense jocundity, which sparkles in the clean air of Manhattan on such days, inspired Don as it inspired the facetious truck-drivers and cab-men abusing each other in a jam of traffic, the good-natured policeman who separated them, the smiling pedestrians who dodged under the horses' heads, the loiterers who paused on the curb to grin and comment, the shrill street gamin, the eager men and women hurrying by on the walks with side glances of amusement—all the bustling life of that thronged island which seems to catch from its sea breezes some of the recklessness that makes sailors so irresponsible, so apparently care-free, so good-natured in spite of their obscure toil and the uncertainty of their fates.

Don walked with a light step, watching the busy activities of which he felt himself a part, as pleased as a recruit enrolled among veterans and willing to accept the hardships of the campaigns of labor as gaily as they. After all, this was life; this was the work-field of civilization, where labor sowed and sweated; this was the place for a man to be—not back there, among the college loiterers of culture, discussing the crops. He swung into Broadway with his head high, looking for the number of the office building where he was to begin his service. It was good to be a useful member of society; it gave a man dignity and assurance. Whatever the object and meaning of life might be—whatever the port to which all this bustle was hastening—it was a man's duty to pull on his oar with his fellows below on the benches, not to loaf on deck vainly studying the impenetrable mists that surrounded him.

He mounted the stone steps of his building and passed between red granite pillars into a hall of tiles and mosaics. A semi-circle of elevators sucked in and poured out two trickling streams of passengers coming and going. A young man in a braided blue uniform gave them the word to start, with a curt "Three! . . . Go on, Seven! . . . One!"

Don asked him: "What floor is the Phoenix Company on?"

He dismissed another car before he replied: "There 's about 'steen hundred of you fellahs up there already, all after one job. You could n't get out of the cage if you went up. You might 's well go an' chase yourself

around the block for an hour or two till they kill a few million of them off. Go ahead, Nine!"

Don hesitated—said meekly, "Thanks"—and went out.

The roar of traffic greeted him with a new note of busy indifference. He stood on the lowest step of the entrance undecided which way to turn, until a messenger boy bumped him from behind, mischievously, and sent him into the current of passers-by. He was carried down the street to an eddy at the corner. There he took out his notes of "Help Wanted," oblivious to the "Pulish, sir? Pulish?" of a bootblack whose chairs were under the shelter of an awning beside him. He found the address of the business "concern" that needed a man to manage its shop; and having inquired the way of the insistent polisher, he set out again more soberly.

The business "concern" proved to be the basement workshop of a little foreigner, in varnish-stained apron and soiled shirt-sleeves, who renovated furniture and sold "antiques." He explained eagerly that he had invented and patented a new process of "tufting" upholstery, and he needed a man to push the patent for him while he was busy in the shop. He expatiated, in a confused but animated dialect, on the money-making possibilities of his machine, puffing out his cheeks and waving his hands. Of course, he would have to have a guarantee. . . . When Don, at last, understood that the needed "manager" was expected to put "fife hundered" dollars into the patent, he merely shook his head and left the man gesticulating.

The sun was hot. His heels were sore with the jarring of the flagstone sidewalks. He went despondently back through interminable and noisy streets, to the next address in his notes; and he was glad to sit in an outer office there, among a score of other applicants for the vacancy, until his turn should come to enter to the manager. Some of his rivals were as young as he, but dressed with a cheap smartness, their trousers turned up at the ankles stylishly, their collars high above "puff" ties that concealed the absence of a starched shirtfront. Some were older men, pitiably meek and patient in their expressions and their attitudes, neat with the neatness of poverty that tries to maintain a good appearance in clothes brushed threadbare. Some were stolid youths, in bagged and wrinkled trousers, in shoes worn down at the heel, frankly poor and indifferent to it. One was a consumptive with an echoing cough which he tried to cover, mechanically, behind the long fingers of his clerk's hand, his eyes fixed on the blank wall that faced him, apparently unconscious of the hollow uproar which burst from him with an irritating frequency on the silence.

The manager appeared suddenly at the door, over the shoulders of a rejected applicant, and announced with exasperation: "Now, there 's no use your waiting here if you have n't had experience. We want an *experienced* man. I told you that before. And you must have references. I 'll not take anyone without good references."

Don took up his hat and withdrew apologetically.

He went back to the rooms for luncheon, dragging his steps. A street piano tried to cheer him; he saw the perspiration on the face of the lean Italian woman who strained at the crank.

II

He received a letter from Margaret, that afternoon, and he read it standing in the portico of the General Post Office, where the traffic of Park Row meets the traffic of Broadway, in a brawling of cross-currents over worn paving stones, at the bottom of a canyon of high buildings; and with that noise in his ears, pressing upon him the sense of the struggle in which he was engaged, he read her accusations, her defense and her apology blankly, word after word, feeling that it was all an old matter of which he had lost the emotion. He took, with relief, the news that she was going abroad for the summer, with her mother; it would give him time to "find his feet" in New York. He missed a hint that Mrs. Richardson's investments had been ill-advised and unprofitable, and that the cheaper living in Germany—where the study of music might be continued—would be welcome to her. He put the letter in an outer pocket, with his newspaper, and tore open an envelop from his father.

Mr. Gregg informed him, briefly, that his action had been a cause of great grief to his mother; that

it was unreasonable, without excuse, and rash; that his home was waiting for him whenever he wished to return to it, but that he should have no assistance if he remained away. "I can scarcely believe," he wrote, "that a son of mine will prefer to live on the charity of relatives. A good position can be obtained for you in Coulton. If, at any time, you desire to come back to it, and have not funds, write to me and I shall be glad to forward you your railroad ticket."

Don tore up the letter and tossed it into the gutter as he crossed the street. No! He was launched. Coulton and the past had already dropped below the horizon behind him. And he could not hope to have Margaret with him again until he reached that shore of his destiny which was still so distant, so uncertain, so far beyond sight of fancy even. He knew that the voyage was not going to be plain sailing in a fair wind; there would be calms and storms and all the delays and accidents of life. But some day, of course, he would arrive; and then (he thought), looking back at the hardships and the despairs, how sorry he should be that they were done with, and how proud that he had weathered them, and how amused to remember that he had almost given up hope under them, that it had seemed impossible they could ever come to an end, that he had longed for this peaceful conclusion which was now so tame a day compared with the adventurous struggles that had brought him to it.

In that mood he continued his unsuccessful search for employment. Learning the need of "references,"

he wrote to his uncle and to the Dean of the University, and received the conventional replies. But these were of no avail to introduce him to work for which he had no particular qualifications, in a city of which he had had no experience, over rivals who had none of his shamefacedness and who elbowed him out of the way with a pushing self-assertion that made him blush for them. He answered every likely advertisement and registered with three different employment agencies that accepted his $2 fee one day and appeared to have forgotten him on the morrow; and he clung to his hopes with a doggedness that would not admit discouragement. But he became sore with a sort of sulky pride, refusing to unbend to the degrading necessities of his situation; and he made his applications for work as haughtily as a shop-girl who has been asked to show samples and who answers all her customer's inquiries laconically, with a studied indifference.

Meanwhile, Conroy had become morosely apathetic. He sat in their rooms smoking at a window that looked out on dead walls. He wrote letters to which he never seemed to get any replies. He went out silently, and after being on the streets for hours he came back to his meals tired but without any appetite; and in conversation with Pittsey, he betrayed an idler's acquaintance with the sights of the waterfront and the Ghetto. He accepted money from Don unhappily, unable to meet his cousin's eyes; and he tried to make himself useful by doing more than his share of the housework, by washing the dishes when the other boys were out, and by bringing Italian cheeses

and Chinese preserves back with him from his long absences. Once he bought a bottle of liquid polish and blackened the gas stove.

In spite of Pittsey's efforts to keep up a cheerful spirit in the apartment, their meals became "lugubrious feeds" as he complained. "What 's wrong with you two?" he remonstrated. "Here you are, seeing New York inexpensively, with all the comforts of home! And you 're down in the mouth because a Wall street millionaire has n't offered you a partnership and a private yacht. What do you expect? Look at me. If I went to Newspaper Row asking for work, I 'd never get past the office boys at the doors. But if I send in an article through the mail, and an editor likes it, I get a little check. If I do it again, I have an introduction to Mr. Editor. I keep it up. In six months I begin to ask for a place on the staff. You two start by asking for the place first, and give up hope when the office boy says 'Nothin' doin'.' What do you expect? Miracles? Don't be so blamed unreasonable. You 're not the heroes of a novel, you know; impossibilities are n't going to happen to you just to help out the plot!"

He was rolling out cracker crumbs with a milk bottle preparatory to baking a dish of what he called "tomato slush." Conroy was cleaning smelts with a penknife. Don was laying the table.

Conroy said: "Oh, you 're all right. You have something to sell. I have nothing and I 'm in debt."

"You need n't worry about that," Don put in. "The money 's as much yours as mine."

"How? . . . How is it?"

"Well—I 've saved it out of what I borrowed from Aunt Jane, this winter."

"Yes, but it 's *yours*. *You* borrowed it." He tossed a smelt into the pan, with a resigned bitterness. "They refuse to lend me a cent."

Don, his ears tingling, pretended to be silently absorbed in the setting of the table; he foresaw some of the difficulties that would develop out of this situation in which his uncle had placed him, and he disliked the double part which he would have to play. His life seemed to him to be becoming confusingly complex, with this duplicity in his relation with Conroy and with the difficulty of obtaining work by a straightforward application for it. Pittsey's insidious pursuit of a place on a newspaper seemed to him too patiently crafty. There was something degrading in such a crawling policy.

This was of a piece with the Quixotism which had kept him going, day after day, to old Mr. Vandever, the philanthropic agent of an anonymous millionaire, who was in need of a private secretary—according to Mr. Vandever—and who had commissioned Mr. Vandever, among other things, to find a suitable young man for the position. Don had watched a score of other applicants for the place file from the waiting-room into Mr. Vandever's office, not to reappear; but when he followed, in his turn, he was received by that benevolent old gentleman with a quick smile of relief that was an unspoken acceptance of him as the single likely applicant among all these impossible ones. When he had given up his $3 registration fee—"which

was unfortunately necessary in order to pay office rent''—he went out a side door warmed by the mild kindliness of Mr. Vandever's manner, touched by the charming tenderness of his old smile, and hopeful with the assurance that his application would be successful ''without doubt—without reasonable doubt.'' Mr. Vandever would write to him. When no letter came, and two subsequent calls failed to carry him past the girl who had her desk beside the outer door—but showed him the office still crowded in response to the advertisement which still stood in the morning papers—he refused to credit the suspicion which he could not help but feel. For if an old man, genial, educated, fine-mannered, sweet-faced and silvery-haired, could be a thief and a hypocrite, then the whole world could be a gigantic swindle, there could be no faith in anyone, and the sunlight on the streets would be a gilding of depravity to make the heart sick. Don could not believe it; or, rather, instinctively, he would not. He preferred to keep his faith in his kind. When his last call found Mr. Vandever's office to let, he went away without asking any questions, for fear that he might hear something shameful.

''Besides,'' Pittsey went on—dipping the smelts in milk and rolling them in flour—''this is the beginning of the summer, the dull season. Every firm in town is laying off men. You should get your hooks into something now, and be ready to land it in the fall . . . Here, Donald MacDonald, get to work and make us some toast. Do you know which side of the bread to brown?''

"No," Don answered simply.

"Both sides." Pittsey laughed. "You 're the poorest pair of kitchen apprentices I ever saw." He bustled around, with the deftness of a restaurant waiter, adding forgotten dishes to the table, watching the "tomato slush" browning in the oven, or turning his smelts in the sputtering frying pan. "Cut your bread thicker," he directed Don. "Your toast will be as dry as cinders . . . Go out and buy us the squeeze of a lemon," he ordered Conroy. "Three for five, they should be. I 'd make you a fish sauce, if I had a recipe . . . When I graduate out of newspaper work into literature, the first book I write will be a cook book. 'Butter the size of an egg.' " He dropped a slice of it into his frying pan. "That 's how the common cook books put it. And you 're supposed to know it was a hen and not an ostrich that laid the egg! I 'll change all that . . . Not on the top, you clam! Your toast will taste like a gasometer. Do it in the lower oven, on the broiler. Put it up close to the flame."

The walls of the shabby dining-room had been covered with posters, gathered by the enterprising Pittsey from news-stands and book-shops. Between the windows—where a leaking roof had discolored the plaster—he had tacked up a collection of printed "letters of rejection" which had come to him, with returned manuscripts, from newspaper offices and the editors of magazines. Don's student lamp lit the table, with its "print table-cloth" (as Pittsey called the spread of newspapers), its sugar in a tobacco tin, its milk

in a bottle, its "poorhouse" dishes and its unpainted kitchen chairs. But the place had come to have a home-like and familiar look to Don; and it had, for him, a tone of youthful defiance of adversity that was loudest in Pittsey's contemptuous display of the editor's regrets that they had not found his contributions "available."

Having put his bread in the oven, Don stood before these letters with the smile which they always encouraged in him. He wished that he might add to them similar letters from all the offices at which he had applied for work; they would fill the wall! When Pittsey became famous—as he would, of course, some day—what a comment on editorial incapacity this collection would be!

Pittsey put his head in the door. "Excuse me for intruding, King Alfred," he said, "but I thought you might like to know that your toast 's in flames."

III

Don found no work that he could do. Conroy, obviously, was no longer even looking for any. And when Pittsey at last sold a "special" to a Saturday "supplement," the sight of his $8 check—received in the morning mail and produced triumphantly at the breakfast table—was like the first nugget to a camp of despairing prospectors. "Money!" he gloated. "Eight of them! Hully Gee, look at it, boys! The

real thing! Would you cash it or have it framed? The 'Nassau National.' Do you suppose they 're good for it?"

The others were smiling doubtfully, between pleasure in his success and envy of it. He understood the expression. "There 's millions where that came from," he said, "and all you need is a pen to dig out some. Why don't you get after it? Why don't you write up the adventures of a poor but honest young man looking for a job in a great, big city, eh?"

There was no reason why they did not—except, perhaps, that they could not.

"Give ovah!" Pittsey retorted. "Any man can write 'if he only abandons his mind to it.' Get a pad of fresh white paper and let yourself go. You might as well be doing something while you 're not refusing applications for your valuable services down town. Try it."

They tried it. Conroy gave it up after a morning spent biting the end of his pen-handle, his face as blank as his paper; he was, apparently, too home-sick and dispirited to have a thought of anything else. Don persisted, tutored by Pittsey, who groaned in private over the stilted English and the philosophic stodginess of his pupil's work. "Put some ginger into it," he counseled. "This is as tame as if you 'd written it for old Cotton. A newspaper does n't want a 'not-only-but-also' thesis on the subject. It wants some facts. If you have n't any, make some up. You might have written this without ever seeing New York or an employment agency. Are n't some of them fakes—some of these agencies?"

Don said he did not know. He objected that he did not wish to write himself up—his own experiences.

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

The fact was—as Pittsey slowly learned—Don had an obstinate delicacy that shrank from putting any of his own emotions into print. He could not look into his heart and write, as the poet directed. He wrote, as he would talk to a stranger, in generalities, "in twaddle" as Pittsey complained, with a masculine reticence in all things that concerned himself.

"Well, go ahead," Pittsey said, at last. "Do it your own way."

He went ahead for three weeks, without a glimmer of encouragement and really without a chance of success. And then he confessed, blushing: "Anyway, I don't see the use of writing stuff like this. I don't see why anyone should care to read it. It does n't really *mean* anything to anybody, does it?"

"It 's one way of earning a living," Pittsey countered.

"I know, but—Well, if a man 's really working, if he 's only sawing wood or cleaning the streets or driving a wagon, he 's doing something that has to be done. He 's helping things along—the world, you know—civilization. He 's—"

Pittsey interrupted him with high laughter. "Well, you *are* a joke! You 're the funniest ever! Let the world get along any way it pleases. It 's *your* getting along that concerns *you.*"

"Yes, I know," Don mumbled, "but—I don't care. It does n't seem worth while to me."

"Don't do it, then!"

"Well, perhaps I would, if I could. I don't know... I can't, anyway."

"Have you found anything better?"

Don shook his head. "What 's Con doing? Does he ever tell you?"

Pittsey made a significant movement of his hand to his lips, throwing back his head.

Don whispered, aghast: "Drinking?"

Pittsey nodded, with a tolerant smile for Don's blindness. "Don't tell him I told you. He 's lost his nerve."

It was late that evening. Pittsey had gone to gather material for an article on "Amateur's Night" in a Bowery theatre. Conroy had been sitting beside the dining table for hours, smoking sourly, his feet on a chair before him and his eyes fixed on the toes of his shoes. Don had been preparing to speak to him, covering his irresolution by pretending to write a letter while he was trying to make up his mind how to begin.

He had asked: "Found anything to do, Con?" Conroy had grunted: "Not a d—— thing." And there was no more to be said of that matter.

Ten minutes later, he had asked: "Heard anything from home?" And Conroy had answered, in the same tone as before: "Not a d—— word."

Don scratched perfunctorily at the letter—which, he knew, he would have to destroy. "Have you written to them?" he asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Why should I?"

"Don't you think they 'd like to hear from you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Conroy did not answer.

Don put down his pen, too nervous to hold it. "You know," he said, "Uncle John asked me to look after you here. He 'd like to know how you 're getting on."

"Write and tell him then," Conroy replied bitterly. "He ought to be glad to hear."

"What 'll I tell him?"

"Tell him what you blame well please."

Don swallowed. "That you 're drinking still?"

His voice went dry on the last word. The silence stood staring at him, holding its breath.

Conroy's head turned slowly, his jaws shut on his pipe. His eyes caught the glow from the lamp and glistened with two danger signals of light in his white face. "What do you mean by that?"

It was too late to draw back. Don arranged his sheets of note-paper with a hand that in some way reminded him of his father's. Then he said, in a tense steadiness: "He blamed me for not writing him, at college, about you. I promised him I 'd write here. He let you come, on that condition—that I 'd look after you, and let him know how you were getting on."

Conroy flamed up: "You mind your own business."

"That 's my business."

"No, it is n't! It is n't yours and it is n't his! He threw me off—without a cent—to starve if I liked—down here. What do *I* care about him?"

"No, he did n't. He said he wanted to give you your chance—not to take you home like 'a whipped cur'—"

"Who 's a whipped cur?" he shouted.

Don shouted back at him: "He said he did n't *want* you to be a whipped cur! I told him those fellows at college had led you into it—the trouble. You said so yourself. Now, here you are, doing the same thing again."

"You 're a liar!"

"Well, I 'm not going to lie to *him*. I 'm not going to be responsible for you if you drink."

"You sneak! It 's the money, is it? You want to get rid of me to save the miserable dollar a week you 've been doling out to me. If it had n't been for *me,* you 'd never have had it to lend."

Don, his anger exhausted, felt himself oppressed with a great weariness, buffeted in this ignoble quarrel. He put his hands up to his temples, his elbows on the table, gone dumb.

Conroy went on, crazily: "You need n't be afraid. I 'll pay you back some way. If I don't, you can make out your bill and collect it from mother."

Don did not reply.

"*Who* said I was drinking? What concern is it of yours—or *his*—if I am? Why does n't he do something to help me along, if he 's so blamed anxious about me? If you 'd been chucked out, without a cent, in a place where you could n't get a thing to do, you 'd want something *too,* to—to keep yourself up."

"You 're not without a cent. I 'll give you all the money you want, if you 'll promise not to spend it that way."

Conroy checked his fury, to cry, contemptuously: "Where 'll *you* get it?"

"Oh, I 'll get it. . . . All he wanted was to give you your chance. You would n't have gone back to Coulton. You were coming to New York, yourself. Now that he let you come, this is the way you behave!"

"Is he sending you money for me?"

"I 'll not tell you."

"Why did n't you tell me before? Why did you pretend you were lending it to me?"

"I did n't. I told you it was as much yours as mine."

"He *is* sending it."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. When everyone 's trying to help you to—to— You ought to be ashamed."

Conroy flung out: "I don't see that you 're doing such a lot. *You* have n't earned a cent yourself."

"No, but I 've tried to."

"Well, have n't *I*? Have n't *I*?"

"You 're not trying to—lately."

"Ah!" Conroy threw out his hands with a snarl of despair. "What 's the use? I 'm down and everyone kicks me! They won't give me anything to do. Why should they? I don't know how to do anything. I 've made a mess of my life." He choked up, boyishly.

"You 're not any worse off than I am," Don said, "and *I* have n't given up. Not by a good deal! I 'll stick to it if it comes to selling lead pencils on the street corner. ... Besides, you can go home at Christmas, to your father's office, if you wish to. You have

him behind you, now, if you 'll only *show* him that you— Heavens!" He looked out at his own future that was yet to be made out of nothing, with his own hands. "If I only had *your* chance!"

They were silent. Conroy smoked with a vehemence that subsided to a more thoughtful puffing of his pipe as he calmed down to reason. Don gloomed over the squares and circles which he was drawing on his blotter in a bitter idleness of mind. He recalled his father's phrase "the charity of relatives"; Conroy had brought the meaning of it home to him. Heretofore, he had had no thought of the money; he had been working to make himself a place in the world that would be fit to ask *her* to share with him; and he had accepted these "loans" from his aunt and his uncle as he would have accepted their good wishes. Now he faced the need of paying them back, of freeing himself from Conroy's reproach, of earning, immediately, enough to make himself independent.

Conroy interrupted, in contrition: "Say, Don, don't write to him that I 've been— I 'll start out to-morrow morning, and find something if—if I have to beg for it."

Don did not reply. He had himself arrived at the same resolve.

IV

THE first heat of the New York summer had begun to oppress the dry streets with an intolerable glare of

sun all day and a stifling sluggishness of exhausted air all night; and Don dragged himself from office to office —in his heavy clothing, in his sun-greened felt hat, in his burning winter shoes—pale and spiritless. Everyone in the city seemed to be short-tempered; the motormen of the cable cars, in their hot uniforms, stamped on the ringers of their gongs; the drivers lashed their horses with whips that cracked angrily in the fierce light; the crowds on the sidewalks pushed and fretted under the scant shade of shop-front awnings. It was the time of year when the police records of spring suicides begin to fall off, and the tenement house murders take their places on the sergeants' "blotters."

Don went, jostled and elbowed, up Broadway to Madison Square, drawn by the sight of green leaves ahead of him. The working world no longer contented itself with merely ignoring him; it had turned on him irritably and shouldered him out of its way into the gutter. He stopped at a print-shop window attracted by a snow scene that reminded him of Canada—a picture of a dejected wolf on a hill-top looking down, over the drifts, on a little village with lighted windows, the smoke of kitchen chimneys rising straight and still in the frozen air. And Don understood the sneaking droop of that wolf's lean shoulders, and sympathized with it.

He crossed to the benches under the trees, to sit among the flotsam of the streets, among the idlers and vagabonds who gather into these stagnant pools of Broadway traffic. He turned his back on the activities of the pavement and the sight of all those fortunate

beings who had cause to be impatient and in haste. He looked at the grass and the leaves, and at the fountain that danced and sparkled mechanically in its pool of water lilies, like something imprisoned there and trained. He remembered his ravine in Coulton and the little water-fall that chuckled over its stones.

He did not notice a man who passed and repassed him with keen glances, studying his clothes, his shoes, his general air of limp discouragement. But he awoke with a start when this stranger sat down on the bench beside him so heavily that the whole seat jarred; and when the man opened his newspaper and turned to the page of "want ads," Don read the list out of the end of his eye, with the involuntary interest of the unemployed. "Never seem to get any less," the man said good-naturedly.

Don looked away, ashamed of having betrayed himself.

"I s'pose they 're like that ev'ry day in the year," he went on. And when Don did not speak, he added: "I know it 's over a year since *I* looked at 'em—an' there was just as many *then.*" He glanced around at Don with a cheerful impudence, and Don nodded. He had colorless eyes under heavy eyebrows; his cheek and chin were blue-black with close shaving. "Yes," he said, dropping his paper to his knee, "over a year ago! I was on the rocks, fer fair—sittin' down in Union Square with no more backbone than a string o' fish—readin' those ads without expectin' to find anythin' fer me either." He laughed. "I might 've been readin' them yet—fer all the good it 'd 'a' done me. That 's

the hell of it in this town. Yuh 're on the other side o' the fence, lookin' at the apples. Yuh can look at 'em till yer eyes drop out, if yuh don't get a lift over the pickets."

Don turned again. The man was smiling thoughtfully at the fountain. "An ol' frien' o' mine came along an' says: 'What 're yuh doin', Jim?' 'Doin'?' I says. 'Doin' nothin'! Carryin' the banner! Poun'in' the sidewalks!' He says 'Hell!'—he says—'Why don't yuh get to work?' 'Why?' I says. 'Why don't I? 'Cause I *can't*. That 's the why! 'Cause there don't seem to be any work to get?' 'Been to see ol' Whitten?' he asks me. 'Whitten?' I says. 'No! Who 's Whitten?' He does n't say a word. He jus' crooks his finger at me. 'Come along,' he says. 'I 'll put yuh wise.' "

He pushed back his hat impatiently. "That 's the hell o' this town. There 's lots o' jobs lookin' fer young fullahs that 're on the square. The trouble is the employers don't know how to find 'em. This ol' guy 's a sort o' religious crank, an' whenever he can pick up a young fullah that 's out o' work an' goin' to the dogs, he puts him in the first place that 's open. A lot o' the best bus'ness houses take their han's from him. Yuh see he makes in-*quiries* an' knows his men. It ain't charity either. He makes the office pay fer itself by chargin' five dollars. But hell, what 's five dollars when yuh get a good thing at fifteen a—"

Don broke in, clutching at the opportunity, in a trembling haste: "Do you think— I 'm—I 'm out of work. I 'd pay him anything. I—"

The man turned with a slow grin that brought the

blood to Don's face. "Well, I 'm d——d! How did I come to tell y' about it! Well, I 'm d——d!" He showed tobacco-stained teeth in a wrinkled smile. "I tell yuh what I 'll do: I 'll take y' over to his joint an' give y' a knock-down to him, eh?"

Don's shame passed in a gratitude that swelled in his throat speechlessly. He heard the man say "over on Twelf' street, near Sixt' Avenuh." They rose together.

The stranger was short and sturdy, with a leg that bowed out behind him, at the calf, like the blade of a sickle; and he walked on his heels, his hands in his trousers' pockets, his hat slanted down on his puckered eyes. He talked breezily. Don went in silence, tall beside him, his immature shoulders sloping from his thin neck, his head erect, vacantly smiling. The noises of the street beat around him unheard. A myriad of woman-shoppers rushed back and forth below him. His starved hopes were gorging themselves in a blind greediness that saw nothing but their food.

The man was saying: "Well, it's a great place, ain't it? Get yer start here an' rise to anythin'—anythin'! Get yer start, that 's all! It 's worth anythin' to get yer start. It 's a reg'lar gold mine, once yuh get yer pick into it." He looked at Don, as if suspicious of his silence. Don appeared to be wistfully studying the faces of the women as they passed. "Girls too," he laughed. "Good-lookers at that! Get yer money an' take yer choice. An' they dress to do yuh proud. Get yer start, that 's all. . . Got any recommends? Eh? Any letters from yer las' job?"

Don explained that he had just left college; that the only letter he had was from the Dean of the University.

"What!" He tilted his hat over one ear, scratching his temple, humorously. "A college education! Well, I 'm d——d! Won't ol' Whitten warm to that! An' a Dean! Say, why did n't yuh get pass-me-ons from the President an' Gov'ner What's-his-name, while yuh *were?* This 's easier 'n cashin' a check. What d' yuh want? How 'd private secret'ry to a Fift' Avenuh coupon-cutter do yuh?"

Don laughed rather uncertainly. "I 'm afraid there 's not much chance of that?"

"Afraid? Hell! Afraid nothin'! I wish 't I 'd' had yer chance the day Jim walked me down here. Where the— It was down aroun' here somewheres." He looked up a side street. "Well, if he 's moved, we can tree him in the d'rect'ry. It must be along further."

Don winked rapidly at the faltering of his hope. The clatter of an elevated train overhead broke in upon him with a return of the old jostled discouragement of these heedless streets. He read the signboards as he walked, vainly trying to occupy his mind in the suspense.

The man said: "Here y' are. I thought the ol' guy—"

Don tripped on the threshold as he followed in, weak in the knees. A red-haired girl, at a desk, nodded in reply to the man's "Mr. Whitten in?"—looking not at him but at Don. Her hard grey eye pursued him with an indifferent curiosity as he passed through to the inner office.

Mr. Whitten rose, peering short-sightedly, and Don,

as he stood behind his companion's glib explanations, stared at something in the face which he thought he had seen before. The grey beard and moustache were unfamiliar; the hair was wrong, but the forehead and the nose, the eyebrows—

"Ah?" Mr. Whitten said. "Yes. . . I recall you, Mr.—Mr.—"

It was the voice—

"Dixon."

"Exactly! I recall you distinctly."

It was the voice of Mr. Vandever!—Vandever, no longer clean-shaven, Vandever without his gold-rimmed glasses and his beamingly benign regard—but undoubtedly the benevolent Vandever. And Don, for the first time, looked at an old man infamous.

It held him like a horror. It revolted while it fascinated him. The squinting eyes, weak without their glasses, were hideously hypocritical. The false smile, the pretence of kindliness, the affected warmth of manner were a disgusting villainy so incredible to him that he could not take his eyes from them. He did not hear what "Dixon" was saying. He stood gaping until Vandever held out a hand to him, and then the approach of contact with this dishonored old rogue woke him to loathing and shame. He shook his head, red and stammering, refusing the hand-clasp; he looked at "Dixon" appealingly and saw in the man's face that he, too, was a partner in the abominable business; then he turned and hurried from the office with the echo of Dixon's "What the hell!" following him like the vile odor of this degradation from which he fled

holding his breath until he could reach the clean air of the street.

He ran against a young man who appeared to be hesitating at the doorway. He began: "Don't—go in. They 're"— But the suspicion that this might be another "Dixon" stopped his voice; and with a despairing disgust of mankind, he pulled his hat down on his eyebrows and strode off tragically.

The young man followed and caught up to him. "What? What did you say?"

"They 're—thieves—fakirs."

"Oh. . . Thanks. What 's the matter?"

Don, safe at a distance from the office, leaned against a lamp-post, and between labored breaths explained what had happened. The other smiled easily. "I saw you going in with that 'tout'. I was wondering whether he was on the level, now. The street 's full of these con. agents. Don't ever pay them in advance. If they 're straight, they 'll only ask a rake-off from your first month's wages."

"An old man too—like that!" Don was trembling like a girl who has been insulted on the streets; and the other watched him, a little amused, a little sorry for him.

"You 're new here?"

Don nodded, his mind set on the memory of Vandever's face.

"You 'll get used to that sort of thing. There 's a lot of it. . . Looking for work?"

"Yes," he answered, mechanically, staring at the gutter, miserable, in a world of roguery.

"What have you found?"

"Nothing! I can't. I can't find anything."

It was the voice of abject hopelessness. His companion studied him, debating something with himself. He coughed, "Well," he said, "I don't know where you 'll get anything regular, but there are a lot of little things to do, to earn a dollar of two, if you want to."

"Where?"

He smiled at Don's amazement. "Why, all over town. You could try boosting down on the Bowery"—

"Boosting?"

"Yes."

"What 's that?"

"Well." He coughed again. "I 'll show you—if you care to try it. It 's fifty cents for an afternoon—a dollar a day if you work nights too."

Don clenched his hands. "I 'll do anything."

He suppressed a smile for this boyish tone of heroic desperation. "Have you had your luncheon?"

"No. I—"

"You 'd better come and have it."

V

He had a low voice and a good manner, an ingratiating gentleness, an attractive quiet address; and to Don he seemed prosperously well-clothed, though a keener eye might have seen that his blue serge was worn shiny on the seams, that his straw hat was a lemon-yellow from

frequent cleanings with acid and sulphur, that his enameled-leather shoes were shabby with a network of small cracks. His features were almost ascetically lean and bony, and he had the mouth of a public speaker that smiled with a slow ease very pleasant to see. After a silence, he always cleared his throat, with a deliberate cough, before he spoke. Altogether, he reminded Don of a young curate whom he had known in his Sunday-school days in Coulton; and unconsciously Don was drawn to him by this memory of his prototype, trusted him, and was ready to confide in him.

They went to a cheap Hungarian café where Don understood neither the names of the dishes nor the ingredients of them; but in a revulsion of emotion, taking everything—including his food—on trust, he was moved to tell this chance acquaintance more of himself and his circumstances than he could have told anyone but an intimate friend; and it was always, afterwards, a marvel to him that he had done so, for the clerical stranger, after introducing himself as "Walter Tower," merely listened and smiled and nodded, with the manner of an elder who understood, but with no return of confidences in kind. Beyond this sympathetic attention, he contented himself with recalling Don to his neglected food. "Yes?" he would say, encouragingly. "These Hungarians do not serve butter. We can order some, if you like, but it 'll be unsalted." Or "Try this dessert. It tastes like Purim cake. Have you ever done any stage work?" And when they had paid the beaming foreigner in shirt sleeves—behind a counter full of bread and pies and boxes of cheap cigars—

Tower held the door open and passed Don out with the same protective smile, somewhat amused but always sympathetic.

They took the elevated railroad around the Battery to Chatham Square.

It was, for Don, a descent into the city's unknown lower regions, but Tower seemed as much at home and as incuriously observant of familiar surroundings as he had been when sauntering along the line of employment agencies on Sixth Avenue. "This is the Bowery," he said, as they came down the station steps. "The 'Rogues' Highway.'" He led silently past the "beer gardens," the "musees," the "amusement parlors" and all the sour drinking resorts and tinselled "fake shows" of the street, apparently unconscious of the vicious and miserable faces that he met, of the staggering drunkenness of ragged men and the pathetic finery of painted women. "This is 'Suicides' Hall,'" he explained mildly, as they passed a saloon. "About three girls a month, on the average, drink carbolic acid there. Don't stare," he added. "And don't answer if you 're spoken to." Don proceeded, silent with the oppression of spirits which seemed to exhale in the stale air of the street, in the paleness of faces that were marked by the summer heat with a drawn exhaustion instead of a healthy tan, in the hoarse cries of the "barkers" at the doors, and in the smell of spotted fruit that came from the push-carts of peddlers at the curb and from the watermelon rinds in the gutters.

They stopped before the "Palace of Illusions: The original Bowery Musee," and Tower said "Wait here

a minute." He nodded to the "barker" in the entrance, passed the inner ticket office and disappeared. Don studied the yellowed photographs of a fat woman, an acrobat in tights, a girl in dancing skirts posed on a rustic fence with her back to the seashore, a pugilist menacing a punching bag—until Tower came out again with a man of Dixon's type, who looked Don over—his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth—and said: "A' right. We 're goin' to start the grind in about ten minutes. Got a dime? A' right." He turned to Tower. "We 're makin' three pushes to a take. Yuh don't want to do any spielin', do you? The man we got 's a heel."

"No," Tower said. "I 'm out of practice. I 'd sooner boost."

"A' right, 'bo. String 'em up. The other boys 'll be along in a shake."

He went in. Tower put his hand on Don's shoulder and started him up the street again. "We have nothing to do," he explained, "but to walk up to that door when the man you saw there begins to call out that the show is 'on.' We wait inside, where they have the free performance, until a crowd has gathered; then, when the 'spieler' (they call him) says 'Right this way,' we push over to the box office, pay ten cents and pass in. He 'll give you back your money inside. The idea is to start the crowd going in."

To a youth of another temperament, it might have been either an amusing adventure or a shocking fall into a lower world; but Don had not the self-detachment which could either enjoy his surroundings as

apart from himself or pity himself as above his surroundings; and he was so accustomed to having events leap upon him unforeseen that he accepted this last bewildering turn of fortune in his usual dazed absorption of new sights. It was no more abrupt and strange to him than his meetings with Margaret or his partings from her, his arrival at college or his leaving it, his varying relations with Conroy, with his father, with the whole world, in fact—this world of which he never seemed able to discern the motives or foresee the acts. Always, as soon as he had planned a future to the last detail of desire, a turn of the road faced him with the unexpected, and he stood lost.

At the barker's hoarse cry of "All free, gents. All free. Step right inside," Tower and he, sauntering past the door, appeared to stop and hesitate. "It costs yuh nothin', now. It 's free gratis, free—all free—an' the fines' show on the Bowery. Step right inside." Tower replied to this invitation, "jollying" the barker, and two or three of the passers-by stood to smile and listen. They followed Tower in, for he looked like a visitor to town "doing the Bowery," and his smiling curiosity was infectious. Within, on a raised "ballyhoo" platform, there was a "fire-eater" in a Mephistophelean costume, a long-haired "Hindoo" who danced bare-footed on broken glass, and a perspiring juggler in faded blue tights; and Tower, watching them go through their "stunts," played his part of inquisitive idler with the ease of an actor, making humorous remarks to Don in loud asides that amused his neighbors in the crowd, and challenging the "spieler" with imper-

tinent questions when that eloquent official came out on the platform to eulogize the acts that were to be "witnessed on the inside fer a dime, ten cents." As soon as the spieler concluded his harangue with "Step this way to the box office," Tower said to Don: "Well, it 's only a dime. Come on. Let 's have some fun with them;" and as he made his way to the wicket—taking care to press forward those in front of him with a persuasive shoulder—he started a current towards the entrance and drew behind him a following of smiling sight-seers who wished to hear him "have some fun" with the performance. Once inside the main hall, with its "side-show" array of booths and small stages, Don and he disappeared behind the curtains of the exit, where the manager returned them their dimes and let them out on the street again for the next "push."

All this occurred with a bewildering rapidity that made it rather difficult for Don to understand; he was puzzled by Tower's part in it; he did not think about his own. "Do you do this every day?" he asked.

"No," Tower said, turning him up the street again. "I have n't done it since I first came to town—six years ago."

"You 're doing it to show me how?"

"Principally. Yes."

Don flushed with gratitude. "Thanks."

"Well," Tower said, "it is n't a highly respectable job, I suppose, but I could n't think of anything else—on the spur of the moment—anything that you can do. And the show *is* worth ten cents. It is n't as if you were doing it for one of those fake 'fronts' down the street."

"It 's—it 's mighty good of you," Don stammered, "taking your time and—"

"Not at all. I 've nothing else to do just now."

"What do you do—generally."

"When I have an engagement, I act."

"On the stage?"

Tower smiled. "Up—at the back of the stage, principally. Yes. . . How do you like 'boosting'?"

"I don't know yet."

"Well"—Tower cleared his throat—"it can't do you any hurt. This sort of thing—seeing the Bowery—puts you wise to a lot of life. It gives you the underside of a good deal. I 'd stick at it for a while if I were you. When the theatres open, you can get some 'suping.' "

"What 's that?"

"I 'll show you, some day."

The barker greeted them afresh: "All free, gents. All free on the inside. Step right in. It costs you nothin'. All free."

Tower stopped. "Is it a free lunch or a public library?"

The barker waved his hand genially. "Neither, my Christian friend. Neither ner both. If yuh 're an eats-'em-alive, yuh 'll find yer cage down the street. This is the on'y original 'Palace of Illusions,' the famous Bowery musee. Step right inside, an' keep yer mouth shut an' yer eyes open. Free performance, gents."

"Come on," Tower said. "Let 's see what they give for nothing."

It was not, as Tower had said, a "highly respectable job," but it was the first opportunity that Don had had to do any thing for himself, and he went through it with the nervous seriousness of a resolve to prove himself capable. He felt that he was being given a trial at last; that he owed it to Tower to flinch at nothing; that he must prove himself to himself, to the world, and to the man who had helped him. He crushed down his conscientious scruples against playing the hypocrite and counterfeiting a fresh interest in each of the free performances; and he tried to pay his money into the ticket office with a properly alluring eagerness. After all, the show *was* worth ten cents, and he was only leading the public on to its own amusement.

When the last "take" was netted, at half-past five, he took his fifty cents from the manager as the first wages of his proven usefulness, and walked out, with Tower, full of a splendid confidence in himself. He had "found his feet" at last, he thought.

He invited Tower to have dinner with Conroy and Pittsey in their rooms, explaining the circumstances of their house-keeping. And Tower said: "Pittsey? What is his Christian name?"

"Bert. Herbert."

"Oh! . . . Don't tell him you met me. I 'll call some evening and surprise him."

"Really! You know him? He 's been here before."

"Yes. How 's he getting on?"

Don related his friend's successes with pride. "Where did you meet him?"

"I used to know him in Canada."

"What!" He stopped on a crowded corner. "Are you a Canadian, too?"

Tower took him by the arm, amusedly, and guided him across the street. "I was born so. There are several thousands of us here—in New York—you know."

"Did you know *I* was?"

"I supposed so, from your University pin."

Don put his hand up to it, flushing excitedly. "Now I understand why—. . . I—I could n't make out why you did it. You 've been . . . mighty decent to—"

Tower tried to make light of this awkward gratitude, turning it off jokingly. "Don't mention it—not to your friend Pittsey, at any rate. This is your station here. I 'm going across town." He held out his hand. "Will you be boosting to-morrow?"

Don closed on his fingers with an eager warmth, as if to detain him until the surprise of the new situation could wear off and leave their parting less abrupt. "Won't I though! Will you?"

"Well, I 'll be down at one o'clock to see you started. Till to-morrow, then." He slipped from Don's grasp. "Good-bye."

As he turned the corner, he nodded and waved his hand to Don, who stood beaming at the foot of the station steps, obstructing the passage. The hot and impatient men and women who bumped against him and shouldered him out of their way, did not understand that he was no longer a useless impediment to the traffic of the streets, that he was a tried and accepted earner of wages, and one of themselves. He forgave them

with an abstracted smile that carried him into a City Hall train instead of the one which he should have taken to the Battery.

He arrived at his rooms for supper, late but jubilant, with a watermelon which he had bought to celebrate his success; and he was met at the door of the dining-room by an equally jubilant announcement from Conroy that he, too, had found work—in the shipping department of a wholesale grocery. "Answering fake advertisements—that 's not the way! I just went from one door to another, all along the street, asking for something to do. They gave me this job when they found out I knew how to put addresses on boxes and barrels, with a brush—*you* know—the way they print them." He had learned that art in his father's warehouse. "What did *you* get, Don?"

"I 'll tell you—some day. It 's a secret."

"What is it?"

"Never mind," he laughed. "I met some one. You 'll see." He plumped his watermelon on the table. "Look at that!"

Pittsey struck an attitude. "The first fruits of honest labor! Gee! Let us gorge."

They gorged. With the appetites of youth and the sauce of their new enthusiasm, they ate bacon and fried eggs for a summer dinner, laughing and talking as if they were on a picnic, making uncouth gurgles as they devoured the watermelon, and shooting the seeds out the window, by squeezing them between thumb and forefinger, in a hilarious trial of skill.

"And this," Pittsey said, as he aimed with another

seed, "this is poverty in New York City! Why, off the Bowery the Italians eat watermelon seeds for dessert. Watch me t'rowin' good grub out the window. Ping!"

Don bit a seed to taste it. "Poor beggars," he said.

"Poor nothing!" Pittsey cried. "I think they have the best of the bargain. There are more seeds than anything else in a watermelon, anyway."

VI

THE Bowery is not only a "Rogues' Highway"; it is, to the tenements of the East Side, what the theater district of Broadway is to the rest of the city; and Don's "Musee" was a crude but honest house of amusement for the poor and for the slumming parties that came to see the poor amused. It was not one of those "fake fronts"—as Tower had called them—which allure the morbidly curious with promises of an indecent exhibition and turn them out a side door, disappointed. Nevertheless, it lived in the heart of a pollution which slowly—as Don slowly realized it—repelled and saddened while it puzzled him. Here was life reduced to its lowest terms of bestiality: vice without its disguising glitter, suffering that had no illusion to make it noble, and crime miserable in its own hell. Where did this inferno find its place in the scientific universe that

gave to crime the joy of its plunder as it gave the wild beast the joy of its prey? And if Man were merely a higher animal, why were these animals not brutally happy in their dens?

It was an experience of life for which Don's books had not prepared him. It was a lesson from life itself and not the colorless argument of a theory of life. And confused by the thousand changing incidents that repeated the question incessantly around him, touched in his sympathies and revolted in his ideals, he went about his "boosting" as if bewildered by the noises of the street, staring and distracted.

Tower did not come on that second afternoon to see him "started," and he worked alone, without any smiling companionship to disguise from him the hypocrisy of his employment. He finished, that day, with a shame of it all which prevented him from telling his roommates what he had been doing; but he returned to it, on the morrow, in the loyal expectation of seeing Tower; and he continued secretly at his post, day after day, because he could not find any other work to do and because he felt himself bound in gratitude to Tower to avail himself of the opportunity which he owed to his fellow-countryman. The sights which he saw, did, as Tower had promised, put him "wise to a lot of life"; but they had the first effect of driving him in on himself as they would turn a nun to her prayers. The hot and unclean street reminded him—by contrast—of the fir trees and the underbrush and the rustling coolness of his woods; and he took refuge in the memory of these. The women of the pavements, whom he saw

drinking in the "beer gardens" or loitering in the side doors of saloons, gave him back that dear ideal of girlish innocence who had sat beside him under a green bower of branches in a childish idyll—and met him like a vision in the snows of an enchanted Sunday morning—and looked across a lovers' valley at the sunset with him, holding hands, under a quiet pine. And when he received a letter from her, written in Paris, he went to Madison Square to read it among those exiled trees that were as dusty as himself and as lonely for the country and the call of birds.

She wrote, in voluble good spirits, of an ocean voyage that had apparently been to her a ten days' "excursion"—an excursion on which she had not missed a single meal, on which all her fellow-picnickers had been "lovely," on which she had had "such a good time." And this prattle was as sweet to him as poetry. She had seen London and Windsor Castle and a host of her mothers' relatives and Westminster Abbey; and she was now in Paris, but they were only to stay a week; they were going right on to Germany. It was all indescribable. He must see it for himself. She had met a charming girl, a "forty-second cousin," who was studying music, too; and they were traveling together, and her cousin spoke French. It was terribly warm, and there were no sodawater fountains—not even ice-water at the English hotels. New York was better than that! What was he doing? He must write to her as soon as they were settled some place. She had to stop now, because her cousin was taking her to an art gallery. She was his "sincerely, 'Miss Margaret.' "

The faint odor of violets—her favorite perfume—came to him from the paper. He put it back in his breast pocket, folded his arms over it, and smiled at the sun-cracked asphalt of the walk. "Miss Margaret!"

Next day, he spent his forenoon in Central Park, and thereafter he made daily visits to one or another of the green oases in the city's desert of brick and stone, refreshing himself for the afternoon's work, and pondering over his new experience of life which that work had given him. His evenings he spent with Conroy, who was full of anecdotes of "Scotty" and "Redney" and the Irish truck-drivers and warehousemen with whom he worked. And when Conroy and Pittsey went out together, Don remained to write his letters to his mother—whom he tried to cheer with vague reports that he was well and happy and at work—and to his uncle, for whom he had the good news of Conroy's steadiness. He was never interrupted by the expected arrival of the mysterious Tower. He took out his volume of Emerson, one night, but only that he might recover from it his fading picture of Margaret. He cut out the shadowy face and put it in the back of his watch-case where he might look at it, the last thing before going to bed, under pretence of seeing the time; and his thoughts of her were like an evening prayer to him.

It was on one of his trips to Central Park that he saw Tower again—from the street car, as Tower was hurrying down Sixth Avenue towards the theatrical agencies that house near Herald Square—and on a characteris-

tic impulse he dropped from the side-step of the car and ran after Tower to greet him.

Tower turned, startled, and shook hands apparently confused by the surprise of an unexpected meeting.

"Where have you been? Why did n't you come to see us?"

He answered nervously: "I lost your address."

"But why did n't you— You could have found me at the same place, down the Bowery?"

He met Don's cordiality with a shifting eye. He coughed. "Well," he said, "to tell the truth, I was ashamed to call."

Don cried: "Why?"

"Well . . . I 'm his brother."

"Whose?"

"Bert's."

"Pitt's?"

"Yes."

"No! Really? Why he 'd—he 'd have been delighted to—"

"I should have called before. He wrote me that he was coming."

"But even so, he"— Don frowned over it.

Tower turned back, up the street, with him. "In the first place, I did n't want him to come—to New York."

"Why?"

"Well . . . I can't tell you that."

"Oh."

"I thought that if I did n't answer his letter, he would think better of it, and stay at college. . . Did you tell him you 'd met me?"

"You asked me not to."

"Yes . . . Yes, so I did." He walked in a troubled silence. " 'Tower' is my stage name." Don did not reply; he did not know what to say; he did not understand the situation at all. "Where were you going?" Tower asked.

"To Central Park—for a walk. I saw you from a car."

"Are you still boosting?"

"Yes."

"How do you like it?"

"Not—not very well."

Tower nodded. They went along together, under the rattle of elevated trains that made conversation impossible. When they reached the comparative quiet of 59th street and crossed to the gate of the Park, Tower said suddenly: "You see, I 've not been very prosperous of late, and Bert—and the others at home—got exaggerated ideas of what I was doing here—and—I was ashamed to have him know that I 'd been boosting and all that, this summer, while I was trying to get an engagement—and meeting you that way—I thought he 'd guess." His voice faded out on an explanation that contradicted itself. His difficulty communicated itself to Don, who looked down at his feet, guiltily, beginning to see the truth behind this screen of words. "I knew he would n't know who 'Tower' was, even if you told him. It 's not the name I use—always. I—"

Don plucked a leaf from a bush as he passed it. "He 'll meet you some day, on the street."

"Yes . . . That 's what I 'm afrraid of." He

laughed unexpectedly. "I 've been going around town like a thief."

The path dipped into an arched tunnel that supported the driveway overhead. Their foot-falls rang hollowly on the echo there. When they came out on the silence of a grove, Don said: "It would be better—If you come to see him, I 'll not let him know that I 've met you before. He does n't know that I 've been boosting, anyway."

"Did n't you tell him?"

"No. I was ashamed to, too."

"Tower" smiled. "It is n't much of a job, is it? I 've been doing a good deal of it myself."

With that confession as a bond of sympathy between them, the rest of their conversation was easy; and Don, seated beside him, on a bench that faced the driveway, learned more of "Tower" than he had ever expected to know.

He was one of those wanderers who leave their homes to try their fortunes in large cities and who go from place to place with no certain means of earning a living but with a resourceful knowledge of how to support themselves from day to day. He had begun life as a hotel clerk, and had left his desk to sell tickets in the box office of a theater. Then he had gone as the "press agent" of a theatrical company "on the road"; and when the failure of the company had left him "stranded" in a Western town, he had done some newspaper work, managed a news-stand in Chicago, been conductor on a street-car in St. Louis, worked in a cigar shop in Pittsburg, traveled in the cabooses of freight

trains to New England, "clerked it" in Boston, and come to New York as helper to a baggage man on a passenger boat. Here, fascinated by the life of the "Rialto"—which satisfied all his restless cravings for Bohemianism and continual change—he had lived in the background of the stage world, a looker-on, playing "thinking parts" in Broadway theaters, sometimes assisting in stage management in the cheaper houses and sometimes returning to the ticket wicket of a box office. Lately, he had had a "run of bad luck," and he had been left for the summer with nothing to do but this "boosting" and "spieling" at Coney Island or on the Bowery. He had been going the round of the employment agencies on the morning he met Don, afraid that in his work at the musees he might meet his brother. "As soon as the theatrical season opens," he said, "I 'll be all right."

"It 's mighty hard to find work, *is n't* it!" Don sympathized.

"Why no!" he replied. "I never had any trouble in finding *something*. The fact of the matter is, I believe *that* has been the curse of me. I found out how easy it was to get along at a certain level and how hard it was to get *above* it—and I have stopped at merely getting along."

He gave it in his gentle voice that had for Don such a fascinating note of wisdom and experience; and Don felt that here was a man who could solve all his problems for him. He tried to put in words the effect which the Bowery had had on him and the questions which it had aroused in him; and "Tower" listened to his stam-

mering explanations, nodding across the blundering pauses and keeping his eyes on the sun-lit driveway with a thoughtful attention.

"Why do we know these people are wrong—living that way? Why are they committing suicide—and drinking themselves stupid—and looking like a lot of miserable condemned wretches—terrible faces all eaten up with disease and wretchedness—if there 's no reason why we should n't be brutes—if it 's *natural* for us to be brutes—if we *are* all brutes? That 's what I don't understand. If honesty and morality are just poppycock stuff that we learn when we 're children—like Santa Claus—why are n't frank dishonesty and frank immorality happy instead of openly miserable—and killing themselves?"

"Tower" shook his head. "I don't know, I 'm sure. I never thought of them that way. They 're just people to me—people I meet. I suppose I get along with them so well, because I just take them as I would anyone else. . . I can see, though," he added, "why they kept you boosting down there."

"Why?"

He looked at Don, as if summing him up, feature by feature. "Because that sort of thing shows in your face."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, any one can see that you 're not one of them."

Don blushed, girlishly. "Neither are you."

"I *act* not to be—so that no one will think I am. You are n't—and any one can see that you 're not acting it."

"I wish I were out of it."

"Well, I hear they 're going to begin rehearsing some early openings next month. There 'll be suping."

"Is that better?"

"Oh my, yes. . . . I 'll call on Bert to-night or to-morrow, and then we 'll see what we can do. . . . Let 's take a walk now, and forget it."

Don returned to his "boosting," that afternoon, with the hope that he should soon be free of it; but he returned in a disgust of it which made it almost unendurable now that "Tower" had admitted what a degradation it was. The day was steamingly hot and humid; the air was blue with a choking haze; and the stones of the Bowery, still wet from a previous night's rain, seemed sweating, greased, slimy with a thin mud that slipped under the heel. The "barker" in the door of the Musee was shouting impatiently, the perspiration running down his neck into the soiled handkerchief which he had stuffed inside his collar. The free performance dragged on without spirit. The "spieler" wiped his forehead, his eloquence gone mechanical, a thing learned by rote and feebly repeated. The manager chafed over the meagerness of the audiences that gathered to all this "ballyhooing" and were herded in by Don and his fellow boosters.

Don did not speak to any of the other "touts"; he had never done so; and they had never made any approaches to him, knowing—as "Tower" had said—that he was not one of them. They showed no curiosity concerning him, for curiosity is not encouraged on the

Bowery. They accepted him as a young fellow "down on his luck," and were more indifferent to him than he was to them. One of them asked him for a match and merely nodded at Don's polite reply that he was sorry he had none—nodded as if the answer was what he had expected. The manager, in the exit, as Don went out, pleaded hoarsely: "Say, 'bo, fer G—'s sake, shove 'em up. String 'em. String 'em." And Don did not reply—because he did not understand.

He was coming out from the second push of the final take—returning to his pocket the dime which he had just received from the manager—when a hand was laid on his shoulder from behind and he looked around at the grinning Dixon, the man who had been tout for the unspeakable Vandever.

"Well, I 'm d——!" he said. "If *you* ain't the slickest con on the walk. Yuh took *me* all right! Yuh played *me* fer a sucker." Don stared at his admiring smile of good fellowship. "What sort o' back-cappin' were yuh tryin' to come on me anyway, that day?"

"What?"

"Aw, shuffle 'em. Shuffle 'em," he laughed. "I 'm on."

"I don't understand what you 're talking about."

Dixon spat on the sidewalk and smiled undiscouraged. "Say, what 's the use? I got a graft worth two o' this d——d supper show here—if yuh want some boostin'—out on Coney. It 's playin' too close to the cushion fer me. An' these touts—I been sizin' 'em up—they ain't the thing. They 'd get the turn called on 'em, first hand. Yuh 're the guy I want. Yuh 've got a mug to steer Mary's little lamb." He saw the dis-

gust of Don's expression, and misunderstood it. "Honest, now. I ain't tryin' to sting y' again. This 's on the straight. If yuh want the dough—"

Don had been watching a street car approaching behind Dixon; when it was almost opposite, he darted aside, as if dodging an attempt to catch him, ran out into the roadway and sprang on the step of the car as it clanged at full speed up the street. And looking back over his shoulder, panting, as if in fear of pursuit, he saw the amazed Dixon staring after him, open-mouthed. As he sank into his seat, the shame of having fallen to Dixon's level broke on him in a hot blush. It burned him like a brand of infamy when the conductor—who had seen him running like a pickpocket and had expected a policeman to appear on his trail—looked at his money suspiciously, hesitated, and then reluctantly rang up his fare.

He was noticeably silent at the dinner table. "What 's wrong, Don?" Conroy asked him, when they were washing dishes together. "Have you been 'fired'?"

"No," he said. "I 've 'left.'"

"What was it? What have you been doing?"

Don shook his head. He felt that no matter how long he lived, he must carry the guilt of that employment with him as a crime which he could not confess. He shuddered to think that some day he might tell *her* —unable to have such a secret between them—and that she would despise him for it.

He went to bed, that night, without looking at her face in his watch.

VII

It was a part of his young intensity that he should regard this experience on the Bowery as a fall from honor of which he should always bear the mark. He had none of that priggish vanity of self-righteousness which so passionately regrets the soiling of his garment; and he had little of the sensitive virtue that continues to shudder with abhorrence at thought of the filth which it has touched. But it seemed to him—as he tried to explain to the elder Pittsey—that "there are laws of morality, like the laws of health, and if a man breaks them he—he has to pay for it in the same sort of way . . . by being sick morally . . . by weakening himself morally. And I believe that 's what 's wrong with all those unhappy wretches on the Bowery. They 're breaking the laws of morality, and they 're suffering for it just the same as they would if they broke the laws of healthy living."

"But *are* they?" the other queried, amused. "*Are* they suffering?"

"Well, they look as if they were. They kill themselves with carbolic acid, as if they were."

"That 's so."

"Of course it 's so. They can say what they please about man being only a higher animal. If he is only a higher animal, at least he is *a higher* animal; and the law of development . . . that has raised him . . . is a real law, and he can't go against it without suffering for it. I believe that!"

"Well, that 's something to believe."

The elder Pittsey had called upon the younger on the previous evening, having obtained the address—as he explained—from the "folks at home"; and he had been introduced to Don by his proud brother, who carried himself with a subdued and respectful admiration for Walter and was impressed by the easy friendliness of manner which developed at once between Walter and Don. He even dropped the note of raillery in his relations with Don, when the succeeding days seemed to strengthen that friendliness; and if he was somewhat envious of the way in which Don was admitted to confidences from which he himself was excluded, he consoled himself by falling back on Conroy for company and left his brother to his choice.

It followed that Don was free to walk and argue with his new friend as much as he wished; and Walter Pittsey was nothing if not a patient listener. The discussions were rather one-sided, and they were always of abstract questions—for Don was still incapable of talking of himself—but they were the aggressive arguments of an idealist who was beginning to find his voice; and they marked a stage in Don's development from his past to his future.

They were, of course, merely the attempts of a bewildered youth to find some working compromise, on which to live, between the barren scepticisms of his education and the instincts which that education could not kill. He was at that most violent period of a man's growth, when the crises of all his fevers come on him together, when he is tormented by the passionate uncertainties of his love and the chilling uncertainties of his

unsettled religious beliefs and the groping uncertainties of his attempts to find a place in a mad world. He walked the streets, day and night, with Margaret's letters in his pocket, the struggle for existence raging visibly around him, and the immense void of the sky overhead dwarfing his loneliness or oppressing, by its indifference, his hope.

It was the mark of his impracticality that he first grew easy in his mind about his merely worldly prospects; for, having earned a few dollars on the Bowery, he accepted them as confirming Walter Pittsey's assurance that it was always easy to find "something" to do; and he resigned himself to waiting idly for the theatrical season to begin. He idled in Central Park, trying to make himself familiar with all the puzzling turns of that labyrinth of walks in the "Ramble," or sitting to smile at the happiness of the children playing in the "Mall," or watching the contented swans floating above their inverted images in the sunlit still waters of the Ponds. He idled in the reading-room of the Astor Library, turning the thumbed pages of the illustrated magazines or drowsing over the philosophical and scientific essays on Assyrian inscriptions and the disputed authorship of the gospels and the latest experiments in the transmission of electrical energy without the use of wires. He idled in his room, of an evening, reading and re-reading the gossip of the newspapers, or sitting with empty eyes before his memories of Margaret—memories that were cast up in pictures of her on the drift of smoke in which he brooded; for he had begun to use tobacco.

He was worried somewhat by Conroy, who borrowed money from him with the careless air of asking for what he knew was his own and spent it ostensibly on theaters and cigars. It was evident from Conroy's talk of "rushing the growler" and "hitting the can" that the men at the warehouse were jovial drinkers; and he himself, on more than one warm evening, came to his dinner with a sleepy lack of appetite that smelled sourly of beer. Don put the situation before Walter Pittsey, on one of their rounds of the theatrical agencies; and the older man made light of it. "A little beer won't hurt him, you know. It 's harmless stuff. Besides, he 's old enough to take care of himself."

"But I 'm responsible for him, to his father," Don said. "He promised not to drink."

"Well I should n't make trouble for him, if I were you. He 'll probably go home at Christmas and stay there. Then he 'll be off your hands. Come up to the house to-night, will you? There 's somebody there I 'd like you to meet."

He lived on one of the upper floors of a theatrical boarding-house off Sixth Avenue, but he had never before invited Don to his room, and Don had been left to gather, from what he heard of the house, that it was the rough Bohemian abode of vaudeville "ham-fatters" —as Pittsey called them. Pittsey professed to like the house because the boarders had reduced the mistress of it to a proper meekness of spirit. "The last time she tried to make trouble for them," he had explained, they carried her saucepans and the covers of her kitchen range up to the roof and dropped them down the chim-

ney. They would n't leave the place, and she had n't the nerve to go to the police court, so she has to get along with them. But I should n't advise you to call on me there. Generally, she does n't answer the door bell. And when she does, she is n't exactly polite."

Because of this state of things, Don and he had always met at appointed places on street corners or in public squares; and now Don replied to the invitation to call with a doubt of Mrs. Kahrle's reception of him. "Well," the actor said, "come at eight o'clock and I 'll meet you at the door."

He went—to escape from the thought that he should be writing a letter, to his uncle, about Conroy.

It was an old-fashioned house with a balcony that crossed the sills of the lower windows and connected with the porch steps; and when Don arrived, that evening, two girls in summer gowns were sitting with Walter Pittsey on the balcony, fanning themselves with newspapers and chatting to him while he smoked. He rose to greet Don and to introduce him to "Miss Arden" and "Miss Morrison"; and because Don could see their faces only dimly—and knew that they could not see his—he was not embarrassed. He was all the more startled, in his security, when Miss Morrison, as he sat beside her, said in a calm aside: "I suppose you have forgotten me, Mr. Gregg?"

He stared at her in the half-light, trying to distinguish her features, of which she gave him only the indistinct profile. (Miss Arden was continuing her conversation with Pittsey: "Oh, she fell down in it. Terribly! Terribly! She was n't in the part for a minute.") Don said: "Why no— Yes. I—"

Miss Morrison waited for him to go on. When he did not, she added, still fanning herself, and without turning to him: "Have you forgotten when you went to Miss Morris's school?"

"Miss Morris's school?" He could see no connection between that almost forgotten past and this meeting with an occupant of Mrs. Kahrle's boarding-house. He laughed nervously. "Perhaps, if I could see you, I—"

Pittsey had struck a match to relight his cigar. She said to him: "Give me that one, Walter. You light another." And reaching the match from him, she turned with it held before her face, at the level of her chin, looked, without a smile, at Don.

He did not notice the theatricality of the action. He saw only that she had the face of a beautiful mask, and that it was as self-possessed as marble itself, with living eyes that studied him as he stared at her. She said calmly: "He does n't remember me."

He had a confused and vague recollection of having been in this same situation, of having heard her say these same words, before; but he could not remember where it had been, and he found nothing familiar in her face. The match burned out between them. She explained, as she dropped the glowing ember: "I 'm Rose Morris—her little sister."

He recalled her as a small girl in short dresses, with a scarlet hair ribbon—a lonely figure in the playground of Miss Morris's school, where the other children had been suspicious of her as the sister of the tyrant. There had been something "queer" about her. They had accused her of spying on them and of carrying reports of their behaviour to Miss Morris; and he felt the

shame now, of having been a party to such an accusation.

She said: "I should have known *you,* I think."

"You 've —You 've changed," he apologized.

She fanned herself in a reflective silence. "Yes, I suppose I have."

Pittsey put in: "You 've changed your name, at least."

"I 've added a 'son,'" she said.

"Oh, my dear," Miss Arden laughed. "How shocking!"

She ignored the remark in a way which Don was to find characteristic; and she continued her conversation with him as if she were insensible of the presence of the others. He was surprised to discover from her questions that she knew he had gone to college with Conroy and had not completed his Freshman year; that she remembered Frankie and him at the High School, where she had looked up to him from a lower "form." It was evident that she had shared the curiosity of the elder Miss Morris in the progress through life of one of her first pupils. He exchanged smiling reminiscences of Coulton with her, and told her what had become of this one and that one of the companions of their school days, in return for similar gossip concerning others with whom she had remained in touch. And when he left her—at Miss Arden's announcement that it was time they were all in their beds—he carried away with him a pleased glow of surprise at having met a stranger who had been, for years and unknown to him, a friendly well-wisher.

He learned from Walter Pittsey that she was on the stage. "She used to be in comic opera, I think," he said, "probably in the chorus. She 's aiming at the legitimate now, but I imagine she 's not doing much. No temperament. She makes a good show-girl, I suppose. She ought to be singing in a church choir."

But it was not her lack of temperament that struck Don in the meetings that followed; it was a strange effect she gave him of being concealed in her own body —hidden behind her beauty that attracted an admiration which did not reach her real self—silent, or speaking as if from a distance of thought. She was younger than Miss Arden, who was a woman of thirty-five, at least, and already puffy under the eyes and hollow in the cheeks where she might have been, at some time, dimpled. And yet Miss Arden seemed younger in heart, chattered more spiritedly and laughed with less reserve. When they made an excursion in the street car to Fort George, on a Sunday afternoon, she was gaily juvenile beside Miss Morris's staid sobriety; and, with Walter Pittsey, she made the life of the party, while Don and Miss Morris listened, watched and smiled.

They rode between the monotonous fronts of cheap apartment houses, that were rusty with the iron balconies of fire escapes and overflowing with tenants who hung out the windows panting, or crowded, for air, to the doors. They rode, behind the motorman's insistent gong, through the games of the street children, and were deafened by competitive shrieks. They came to the hills of the suburbs, covered with patient cemeteries, orphan asylums, homes for the aged and the blind

—all as quiet as prisons—the field hospitals for that army of workers encamped in the city below. And they ended on the veranda of a café crowning a breezy hilltop above the river valley and facing a peacefully wooded horizon that was smoke-blue in the mist of a humid midsummer afternoon.

There they ate tricolored ices and drank cool drinks, while Pittsey and Miss Arden discussed the affairs of "the profesh," and Miss Morris turned to the breeze with a thoughtful languor that showed in the slow movements of her eyes as she looked from the rover up the sides of the valley and across the hilltops, peak after peak. When Pittsey proposed that they stroll down the slope through the inviting underwoods, she said: "I 'll wait for you here."

It was Don who remained, by tacit consent of the others, to keep her company.

She watched a bird soaring and sailing over the valley; and she asked, without taking her eyes from it: "Won't you smoke?" He replied, in the same tone, that it would be "a crime" to soil such a breeze with the smell of tobacco. The bosom of her light gown rose and fell over a long sigh; she laid her arm along the veranda rail, and the drooping line from her round shoulder to her curved wrist and relaxed hand had the unstudied grace of all her unconscious poses. He smiled with an æsthetic satisfaction in her beauty that repeated the repose of the calm distance and held the color of his mood; and he was the more irritated—by the intrusion of the world they had left behind them —when she asked abruptly: "Are you going on the stage?"

He replied: "I don't know what I 'm going to do. I 'm taking anything I can get. . . Why?"

"Oh," she said, "it 's all so hateful!" And with a suddenness that amazed him, he found himself behind the barriers of her silence and admitted to a confidence which—though at the time it moved him to a reciprocation in kind—he was to look back upon doubtfully, as if it had been an indelicacy. "If I were a man, I 'd do anything—anything but *that*—dig ditches, anything —work on a farm, anything. You don't know what it is—the managers, the women—such vulgarity—and to be set up on a platform to be stared at, like a freak in a dime museum! . . . If I had learned something—something to make a living by!" But she had only her music and her singing; and her music was nothing, and her singing was scarcely fit for the chorus. She had gone into the "legitimate"—as they called their serious attempts to be dramatic—because the life of a chorus girl was a disgusting vanity to her. She had not succeeded. "I can't do the things *they* do to succeed," she said. "And neither can you."

"No," he replied, "perhaps I can't. . . Though I 've done one thing since I came here—a thing I did n't believe I could *ever* have done. And I never will again. Never!"

The emotion gave his face a life which she had not seen in it before. She raised her arm on the rail and leaned her cheek against her hand, watching him.

"Besides," he argued, "what difference does it make whether we succeed or not? What difference will it make in a hundred years from now—so long as we

don't do anything wrong—anything to be ashamed of—anything—" He made a gesture that expressed nothing at all.

"Yes," she said. "A hundred years from now!" She gazed out over the valley, thinking of the crowded cemeteries she had passed in the street car. She sighed. "I wonder where we 'll be in a hundred years from now."

It was after a musing silence that he replied: "I wish I knew."

"They were happier," she said, "those people in the graveyards. They had something to believe in." She came out of her reverie to find him leaning towards her across the table, saying excitedly: "So have we!"

She stared at him. "What?"

"Something to believe in."

She did not reply.

"I know," he said. "I 've felt about it just as you do. But look here: if man *was* an ape, once, if he lived in caves, if he *was* the savage brute that the Fiji Islanders are now, he rose above it, did n't he? He grew, and he found out the laws that governed his growth, and he wrote them down, and enforced them, and made a religion of them—did n't he? Well, to me, those laws are as real as the laws of gravity—every bit! And there 's something behind them just as sure as there 's matter behind the law of gravity. Yes. They can deny that. Let them! They have to live in accordance with those laws, and they know it. And so do we. If we do what 's wrong, we 'll suffer for it—in ourselves—just the same as we 'd suffer in our bodies if we did n't obey the laws of hygiene! We—"

She had looked over his head at the unexpected return of the others. He had caught the warning in her expression, and glanced back, sitting up in his chair.

Miss Arden came smiling. "Well! You seemed interested."

Miss Morris asked, defensively: "Where did you go?"

Pittsey said, with an amused eye on her: "He 's been having one of his serious talks with you, has he?"

"It 's a relief," she replied coolly, "to be talked to, sometimes, as if you had brains."

Miss Arden laughed, with all the sprightliness of stage comedy. "Ah, my dear, be careful! It 's the most dangerous form of flirtation."

"Do we start back now?" Miss Morris asked, so oblivious to their banter that she saved even Don's shamefacedness.

They started back, but she remained thoughtfully indifferent to them—and to him—on the street car. It was not until they were parting at Mrs. Kahrle's door, that she said, in a low aside to him: "Thank you—for a delightful afternoon." And her tone of gratitude was so deep with suppressed intensity that it startled him.

It was the result of that tone—and of the qualms of conscience which it awakened in him—that when he returned to his room, he sat down to write to his uncle a full report of Conroy's condition and of his own part in it. He felt that he must clear his honor of this affair before he could meet her again. He resolved to tell her of what he had done on the Bowery; and he spent an hour, in the evening, imagining himself telling her and picturing her reception of his confession.

That was a measure of the difference between his thought of her and his thought of Margaret. He could not have imagined himself making such a confession to Margaret. With a lover's unconscious duplicity, even in his reveries, he concealed from *her* everything in himself that did not seem worthy of her.

VIII

THE "Rialto," on these August mornings, was the resort of all the actors and actresses who were still in search of an engagement for the "season"; and Don accompanied Walter Pittsey, from agency to agency, in the atmosphere of a life that was new to him. Here were the leading men of road companies, bearing themselves with an obvious "stage presence," dressed in the correct summer costume of the footlights and preserving the unreality of the stage in the very faultlessness of clothes that had the appearance of being part of a theatrical "wardrobe." Here were comedians, more or less "low," who carried a lighter manner, a necktie fluttering in the breeze, a straw hat slanted over the eyes, a hand waved in an airy greeting as they hurried by. Chorus girls of conspicuous complexions, in gowns of lace and appliqué, raised their dragging skirts to show silk petticoats of pink or green, and stared through their heavy chiffon veils at the would-be "ingenues" in their simple frocks. Soubrettes, "heavies," "general utilities" and young graduates from dramatic schools,

walked haughtily past the groups of untrained and awkward beginners who had registered—as Don had—with the agent who engaged "supers." And they all passed and repassed, met and nodded, bowed and shook hands effusively, in a way that reminded Don of the students in the college corridors, meeting after their Christmas holidays, hailing friends and acknowledging acquaintances. There was the same air of camaraderie, tempered by the same marked distinction of distance in the manner of the upper years to the lower ones; there was the same tone of social irresponsibility in the circle of a privileged life; and there was the same note of unreality and evanescence—derived, in this case, from the exaggerated manner of these Bohemians who "made up" for the street as if for a stage entrance and walked in the sunshine as if it had been a calcium light.

But though they reminded him of his college days, it was only to make him happy that he had left those days behind him. His last letter from his mother had brought him word that Frank had passed his "matriculation" with honors, at the head of his school; and Don was glad of the fact that his brother's rivalry could not pursue him to the Rialto. He contrasted this street with the streets of Coulton, and his liberty here with the life which he might have led at home. The difference for him was all the difference between romantic adventure and drab matter-of-fact. The catchwords of greeting which he heard in the waiting rooms of the agencies—"Hello! What luck?"—came to him like the croupier's call to a gambler. Youth pursued opportunity in a game of chance in which futures were at stake, and

every turn of the hour was watched with eagerness. This was a life to keep the heart beating.

He had met Kidder, the "super's" agent, and been looked on with a favor which was largely of Walter Pittsey's procuring. "You 're all right," Pittsey had assured him. "Kidder has a problem here, trying to get intelligent-looking supers. He has to pick up all sorts of bums and muckers to fill up his ranks. I 've asked him to get us something together. I 've told him you 'll stay with him—though *I 'll* go on the road if I can get a part. He 's put us down for an English thing they 're going to begin rehearsing next week."

That, Don felt, would be the beginning of his worldly progress; the rest would be merely a matter of time. And with his new pseudo-scientific theory of religion to comfort his doubts, his future began to regain some of the tints of happiness—the misty blue tints of distant peace. The figure in the immediate foreground of his outlook was still Miss Morris; but he had not yet had his confessional tête-a-tête with her, because she gave him no opportunity to do so. She carried herself among the actors on the street as if she were ashamed of being seen with them; and she admitted to Don that she was sorry to see *him* there. Why? "Because you 'll never make a success of acting," she said. "It 's absurd." He tried to make her understand that he was not ambitious. "Then you should be," she replied. "At least you should be taking up some work that you can remain in all your life. I hope you don't intend to keep at this sort of thing."

"Why not?"

She turned into the door of an office building that was full of theatrical agencies. "Well," she said, curtly, "I supposed that you intended, some day, to settle down."

He went back toward his room undepressed by her criticism. Evidently, as Walter Pittsey had said, she was out of her element. She should have remained in Coulton, teaching in her sister's school, if settling down made up her idea of the whole end and object of life.

He hesitated at Madison Square, intending to sit under the trees for a moment and think it all over. But he remembered that he had left the breakfast dishes unwashed on the table; and it had been his turn, that morning, to wash up. He continued down Fifth Avenue, in the scant shade of mid-day, tired by the heat and excitement of a crowded morning.

As he ascended the stairs to his rooms, Bert Pittsey called over the railing: "Is that you, Don?"

"Yes. What is it?" He supposed that Pittsey wished him to do some shopping for luncheon, and he waited on the step. Hearing no reply, he continued his ascent; and as he approached the landing on which their apartment opened, Pittsey came out—his hat in his hand—and whispered as he escaped past him: "Your father's in there. Some one 's written him that you 're going on the stage."

Don's irresolution carried him to the doorway. His father was sitting beside the dining table; it was covered with a disorder of stale food and dirty dishes; and he looked strangely out of place and as if degraded by

the indignity of his surroundings. He did not rise. At Don's challenging stare, he said: "Well, come in."

Don crossed the threshold. His father scrutinized him silently as if trying to see in his appearance some indication of what had been happening to him in New York. He was pale, shabby, thin, and as dumb as guilt.

Mr. Gregg pushed away from him a dish of half-eaten porridge that had turned brown in its milk. He put his elbow on the table with the air of beginning an examination. "Your mother hears that you are going on the stage? Is this true?"

Don said, thickly: "Yes."

Mr. Gregg raised his eyebrows. "Do you find that sort of life particularly inviting?"

Don shook his head. "No."

"You do it, then, because you feel that you have great dramatic ability?"

But this sarcasm made Don aware that he was being treated as a child, and recovering from the first instinctive obedience that had moved his tongue in spite of himself, he refused to reply.

Mr. Gregg went on, slowly: "Or is it because the wages are so high for beginners? . . and the prospects of advancement so alluring?"

Don looked up at him with narrowed eyes, meditating a defiant answer. His father put in, quickly, in another tone: "Don't misunderstand me, now. I have not come here to find fault with you. I merely wish to know why you are doing it."

"Because there 's nothing else," he replied sullenly.

His father refused to accept the challenge of his man-

ner, but looked down, frowning, at the bare floor, his eyes concealed by his heavy grey eyebrows. "Surely you don't think that?" he said. "Surely you understand that there 's a place in life made ready for you in Coulton—that there 's honest work for you there, among your friends, among your schoolmates, with a home for you to live in—and your mother. . . She has not had a happy minute, you know, since you left."

Don fumbled with his hat; this manner of attack unnerved him. He had not expected gentleness.

"I don't understand you," Mr. Gregg continued. "I have never professed to. I had to leave these things to your mother. But I have never been consciously unkind to you. I have tried to do my duty to you. And it seems to me that you have behaved in a way that is cruel to your mother and most undutiful to me. Why is it? Why are you here? What is it you wish to do with your life? Surely, as your parents, we are entitled to some consideration—to some explanation."

He was asking for a confidence which he should never have had to ask for. It was too late. It was too late for him to ask from the young man what he had repelled in the child and never encouraged in the boy. Don struggled with himself to speak, but when he raised his eyes to his father, he saw only the tyrant of his past, now impotent. The figure of oppression had shrunken; he was old and worried, and he had even a provincial appearance in his lawyer's frock coat and his collar that was out of style. He was pathetic, but he was not lovable.

Don stammered: "I can't— I can't explain."

"Why not?"

"I can't go back—that 's all. I can't go back."

"Why not?"

Don shook his head, his face averted. There was a long silence. He leaned back against the jamb of the door, and his eyes fell on a frying pan that was on the end of the table. The bacon fat in it had jellied disgustingly. He found himself wishing that he had washed up before his father came.

Mr. Gregg continued: "I came down with your uncle, who is taking Conroy home. He wished you to return with us. Will you go with him—if you will not with *me?*" When he received no answer, he said more sharply: "You understand that he will not assist you to remain here. Any arrangement which he made with you terminates on your cousin's leaving. If you are determined to defy us, you must do so without his assistance."

Don saw and despised the diplomacy with which his father had manœuvred in order to arrive with this ultimatum. He said: "He has n't assisted me."

"Don't lie, sir!" his father snapped.

"I don't lie."

"You tell a falsehood!"

"I borrowed money from him. I—"

"Exactly."

"I 'll pay it back."

"No doubt. You are apparently"—He glanced at the table—"living in luxury here. Have you earned a single penny yet?"

Don shut his lips. He felt that no matter what a son

of his had done, he could not have stung him with such a taunt as that. And his thought showed in his face.

"Well, then," his father cried, "answer me! What do you hope to do here? Why did you leave college? Why do you refuse to come home? Do you hear?" He brought his fist down on the table with a blow that jarred the dishes. "Answer me!"

Don threw out a hand in one of those nervous and futile gestures that were characteristic of him. "Because I can't! Because I won't! Because there 's nothing there—the life—nothing! I hate it. I 'd die first."

The lawyer pointed a keen finger at him. "You 'll die here—or you 'll do worse. You 've been here now a whole summer, and you 're no farther ahead than you were the day you came. Don't think you can deceive me. I know you. You 're as foolish—as unpractical—as a girl. You 've been living on the money you had from your aunt and your uncle. When you have n't that—you 'll have nothing. You 're living a beggar's life now, and you refuse to come home because *there* you 'd have to work. The fear of work drove you to college. You idled for a whole year, and when your examinations impended you ran away. You 're a lazy loafer. You 'll come home and get to work—or you 'll stay here and starve. Your uncle will help you no more. I 'll see to that!"

Don swallowed, white. "Thanks. If you won't help me, at least you can—"

"Help you! Help you to what?"

He threw his hat on the table. "I don't want your help. I don't want anybody's help. I 'm going to live

my life in my own way." He took up the frying pan and the coffee pot and carried them into the kitchen. "Leave me alone; that 's all. I can take care of myself."

He began to clear off the table, filling the kettle and making the dishes ready in the washpan. He was trembling with a resentful determination, tall, fragile, pitiful in this ludicrous occupation of scullion.

When he went into the kitchen, his father wiped his forehead, his eyes wandering over the poor discomforts of the room—which he had thought to find Don eager to leave—baffled, but still resolved to take the son home to the mother and save him from this folly. He had tried sarcasm, gentleness, abuse and anger; he had played all the tricks which his trade uses to draw the truth from the witness in the box! and as yet he did not even understand what it was that his son was concealing from him, what had brought the boy here, what kept him here, what he hoped to find here that he could not find at home.

He lighted a cigar which he had accepted from his brother-in-law on their railroad journey together; and he smoked it as if he did not know that it was in his mouth—his eyes darting from point to point of the evidence which he had gathered from Mr. McLean, from Pittsey and from Don himself—his eyebrows working —sometimes shaking his head, and more than once closing his hands on a parental impulse to thrash the young fool into submission and take him home by the ear.

Don washed and dried the dishes, emptied the water into the sink, scoured the pan, hung up the dish rag,

washed his hands, and at last had no further excuse to keep him from the dining-room.

He did not look at his father. He filled his pipe and sat down beside the window.

"Well," Mr. Gregg said, with a calculated mildness, "if you are going to stay here, will you tell me what you intend to do?"

"I don't know."

"You 're going on the stage?"

"Yes. I 'm going on the stage."

"As your life work?"

"I suppose so."

"You have no training for it."

"No."

"You hope to succeed at it?"

"I don't hope to succeed very well at anything."

"Why not?"

"I don't care whether I do or not."

"You don't care whether you succeed or not?"

"No."

"Why?"

"There are other things in life more important."

"What are they?"

"Oh, you know them as well as I do."

Mr. Gregg studied his cigar with an admirable self-restraint. "You hope to marry, I suppose."

"I suppose so."

"To support your wife and children?"

"I suppose so."

"On the stage?"

"Or in some other way."

"You have n't decided how?"

"No."

"Do you appreciate the difficulty of making an honest living for a wife and family in a city where you have no friends, no relatives? You are starting out, here, like a man in a new country, and you are leaving behind you, in Coulton, all the assistance that would make the way easy for you."

"I understand all that. I can't go back to Coulton."

Mr. Gregg sprang the next question like a trap: "Who is the young woman?"

Don did not answer.

"Is it Miss Morris?"

He flushed resentfully.

"Do you think she would sooner have you on the stage than in some honest employment? . . . Do you think she would be happier here than in Coulton? . . . *Do* you?"

Don put down his pipe and stood up to face his father. "What 's the use?" he said wildly. "What 's the use of all this? I could n't make you understand if we were to keep this up forever. You don't— The things that are important to you, to Coulton, I don't care that for." He tossed them away with his bony hand. "The things that make up my life—if I were to tell you—you 'd laugh at me. Why can't you leave me alone? Why can't you go away and leave me alone?"

"Because, unfortunately, you 're my son. Because your mother worries herself sick about you. Because she 's ill and weak, and this is killing her. Because"— He raised his voice in a trembling passion—"you owe

it to her, you ungrateful dog, to go back there and behave yourself. Do you think I care! If it were n't for her— God! that it should be in your power to make a woman suffer, and lie sleepless, and watch me as if I were a brute that had driven you out of the house!" He clenched his hands, with a terrible face. "You callous young hound! This is the important thing in life! To make every one miserable that loves you! To kill the mother that almost gave her life for you once already! To break up the home that sheltered you! Oh, you whelp! You—"

"Stop!" Don gasped. The horror of the accusation was more than he could bear to listen to. "I won't— I won't—" He caught up his hat and ran to the door. "I won't—"

His father heard him slip and fall on the stairs. He stood holding to the table, until he heard nothing but the noises from the street echoing in a dull rumble in the air-court outside the window. Then he sat down to wait.

Don did not return.

He did not return until late at night, and then he came limping, to find Bert Pittsey sitting alone at the dining table working on one of his "specials." Conroy had packed his trunk and departed with his father. There had been no messages left for Don, except a note from his uncle enclosing a small check and advising him to return home.

He sat down to write a letter of frantic affection to

his mother, appealing to her not to worry about him, exonerating his father from all responsibility for his misbehaviour and promising an impossible success for himself and an end of all trouble for her in the near future. His hand, wet with perspiration, stuck to the pages as his pen trembled across them.

He wrote another letter to his uncle, returning the check with thanks. He ate bread and butter at midnight, chewing mechanically, his eyes fixed on the lamp; and then he went to his bed, alone, abandoned, with a sinking tremor of nervous apprehension that lay like a nightmare on him in the stifling darkness and heat of the room.

IX

He woke defiant. He ignored the implied reprobation of Bert Pittsey's silence concerning Conroy's departure, although he knew that Pittsey must despise him for having betrayed Conroy to his father. He ignored Conroy's upbraidings, received in a letter which he destroyed without reply. He arranged that Walter Pittsey should take the vacant share in the apartment, and made no explanation to his friend, although he could see that Walter expected one. He told himself that he had done what was right; and he did not care what any one thought of it. He was going to live his own life in his own way.

In that mood of bitter isolation, a letter from Margaret in Leipzig, came to him like a message of affec-

tionate trust, although there was nothing in it but her usual friendship. She was worried by the fact that the failure of Mrs. Richardson's investments had forced them to practise the meanest economies. "I shall have to earn my living now, without joking. Do you want any more music lessons? Do you remember your first one? Are you keeping up your practice? Do not be surprised if you see me in New York suddenly, because we are actually afraid of being left here without money, so far from home, and mother is tired of traveling on nothing. I do not know *what* may happen. How are *you* getting on? Write to me here."

He wrote her a long impassioned reply that was a sort of confession of faith in her and in all the ideals which he associated with her in his thoughts; and he went to his rehearsals, with Walter Pittsey, in the stilted manner of a martyr who has been fortified by a secret communion with a priest of his religion.

He found that Miss Morris had been engaged as a "walking lady"—an "extra" like himself. He supposed—from the way in which she avoided him—that Walter Pittsey had told her how he had betrayed his cousin.

For the first week, of course, he was drilled in his street clothes, on a stripped stage, in the choking twilight of a closed theater, suffering all the indignities of being driven, with the herd of "supers," by a raucous stage manager who continually exhorted them to "put more guts" into their work—an expression which revolted Don like an indecency. But with the dress rehearsal

came the excitement of "making up" under Pittsey's direction—for Pittsey was acting as the "head of the supers"; and when Don had put on the top hat, the frock coat and the other morning wear of an English gentleman of fashion on the stage, he smiled at himself in the pier glass of the dressing room, stroking, like a dandy, with his gloved fingers, the gummed moustache that was tickling on his upper lip. For the first time, the element of "make-believe" in the work appealed to him.

Kidder, the agent—who not only furnished the supernumeraries but acted as a sort of overseer of them when they were not on the stage—came into the room on his round of the theaters, and complimented Don on his appearance. "That looks well on you," he said, with intent to flatter; for in his business of supplying "extras," he found it difficult to get youths of Don's intelligence and more difficult still to retain them. His praise was sweet to Don; and it added the final touch to his pleasure to find himself in a profession where such amenities were practised.

He raced upstairs after Pittsey, to take his place among those others who were to represent a crowd of promenaders on the Strand, in the first scene of the play; and now the game of make-believe was gorgeously colored and dazzlingly alight. He smiled at the boys in their grease-paint that gave them the complexion of young Sioux, and at the girls in their rouge that added, in its exaggeration of unreality, a charm of something romantic to their young cheeks. When the stage manager called: "Take

your places. Take your places!"—and the rehearsal began,—Don sauntered out into the sunny glare of the calcium light and saw Miss Morris coming across the boards toward him, a haughty English beauty in a summer gown, under a flowered parasol. He raised his hat to her, smiling gallantly.

She dropped her handkerchief, startled by the change which the grease paint and the false moustache and the fine clothes had made in him. He picked it up for her, with a flourish. He shook hands with her, shoulder-high. "May I have the pleasure of a turn on the Strand with you?" he asked gaily. "Most certainly. I should be delighted!" she replied, in the game; and they returned together to the wings, Miss Morris gone nervous with the knowledge that the stage manager had been watching their by-play.

"All right," he said to them gruffly. "Leave that business in. It 'll do. Go ahead." He called to the others: "Not so fast there. This 's no foot race."

Pittsey warned them, when they met in the opposite wings: "You 're in luck that he did n't call you down. You 'd better not put in anything else that you don't get from him."

Don slapped his leg with his cane. "Had to do it," he laughed. "I could n't leave the lady to pick up her own handkerchief."

But he did almost leave it to her to pick up, on the opening night of the play; for as soon as he stepped out on the stage, he was aware that the footlights stood at the mouth of a black cave from which the audience, like some huge animal with a thousand pairs of eyes,

was watching, in a malevolent silence, every movement of the actors; and he went stiff with an attack of stage fright. Miss Morris steadied him with a cordial clasp of the hand. "It 's all right," she said under her voice. "No one is looking at us, you know. We 're only to fill in a background. You turn around with me." He recovered himself as soon as their turning brought her between him and the audience. He laughed at himself when they reached the wings.

The scene was a "box-set," representing a jewelry shop with stools and counters; and the promenade of supers passed across an opening in the rear wall of the "set," where gaps of white gauze represented the plate glass of two huge display windows and a double door. While the first act worked itself out, in the loud voices of the principal actors near the footlights, Miss Morris and he crossed and recrossed the windows in this stream of "extras," or stood chatting with Walter Pittsey in the wings until it should be their turn to cross again. Her cheeks were flaming with rouge; her eyebrows were pencilled; her eyelashes were as thick as black pins with "cosmetique"; and these artificialities gave her beauty a coquettish enticement for Don. He was grateful to her for having held him up when he had faltered over the handkerchief. She smiled and chatted rather archly, enjoying his good spirits and the way in which his eyes clung to her, admiringly.

It was near the end of the act that he asked her, apropos of nothing: "By the way, how did my father know I had met you—here?"

They were in the middle of their passage across the

stage, and as they neared the wings her public smile of high society slowly froze. "Perhaps," she said, "because I wrote my sister so."

"Oh." They moved into the shadow behind the reflector of the calcium light. "Did you tell her that I was. . . going in for this sort of thing?"

There was a note of defiance in her flat "Yes."

He stood in front of her, studying the reflection of that tone in her face. He hesitated to believe what it implied. "She must have told him so," he suggested.

"I asked her to."

"You—!"

"I wanted them to stop you," she said, uncompromisingly. "I did n't think you should do it."

He did not reply. She opened her parasol, preparatory to taking her turn again in the promenade. When she looked up at him, she found him smiling doubtfully.

"You 're as bad as I am," he said.

She did not understand him, being ignorant of his affair with Conroy. "I beg—"

They were interrupted by a cry down the stage—the cry that was the signal for all the street crowd to rush to the windows of the shop and gaze in at an actor who was shouting "Police! Thieves! Police!" Don lost her in the jostle. When the curtain fell on the act, he went downstairs to the supers' dressing room, with an expression of face that puzzled Walter Pittsey.

It puzzled Miss Morris even more when he joined her in the background of the next scene; and his amused explanation that her treachery relieved him of the guilt of his own left her still in the dark. She did not

get his point of view. While he was telling her of his quarrel with his father, she took his father's part against him, in her thoughts; and when he made a clean breast of his betrayal of Conroy, she sympathized with his victim and blamed *him.* She was accustomed to judge actions by the wisdom and justice of their results; the fact that he considered only the moral impulse that inspired the act escaped her. She was relieved by his smiling forgiveness of her interference in his affairs, but she did not see why this interference should draw him to her.

They were separated by the movement of the play and did not meet again until the third act, set to represent an English lawn party in which they sat at one of a number of rustic tables among stage trees. It was necessary that they should appear to be engaged in an animated conversation, oblivious to the actions of the principals who spoke their lines in the foreground of the scene; and she asked him how he liked his new profession of actor. He replied that he liked it very much —but he could not tell why. Certainly it would enable him to live without borrowing. He was to be paid 75 cents a performance; so that, with the two matinees, he would receive six dollars a week. He was looking around for something to do in the idle mornings. "At any rate, it 's better than boosting on Bowery," he said; and he proceeded to tell her of that adventure.

It led up to the problems which he had discussed with Walter Pittsey in Central Park, and thence to the question of religion which he had broached with her on the

veranda of the café at Fort George. And looking out thoughtfully at the actors strutting and posturing against the glow of the footlights, he tried to tell her of another conclusion which had come to him in his solitary debates with himself.

"Almost the first thing I can remember," he said, "is the Christmas eve when I found out that there was no Santa Claus. I don't think—I can't tell you what a shock it was." He smiled. "Nothing that has happened to me since—about religion—hit me harder. . . But don't you see that there *is* a Santa Claus! He is n't a man in a fur coat—and a reindeer sleigh and all that—but he *is* the spirit of Christmas, is n't he? They 've personified that, and made a saint of him, and invented legends about him—for the children—but when we 're no longer children, and don't believe in him, we still have that Christmas spirit—and it 's *that* that gives presents and makes us feel kindly towards one another, and makes Christmas what it is. . . Is n't it? . . . Well, that 's the way it is about these other things. They 're true—if they 're not true in the way we used to think they were."

She nodded, somewhat nervously. She felt the absurdity of such a conversation in such surroundings, and she was afraid that someone might overhear it. She was relieved when the stage dialogue gave them the cue to retire into the wings, where they parted.

NEVERTHELESS, she admired in him this almost ludicrous earnestness, as one admires in another a quality which shame conceals in oneself. She gave up her

attempts to inspire him with her own aversion for the stage; and seeing the childish pleasure which he had in his work, she tried to help him by her criticisms and her counsel. She had been trained in a "dramatic school," and she endeavored to give him the benefit of that training in her advice. She found, to her greater bewilderment, that he did not wish to be an actor; that the very thought of coming out before the opera glasses and mimicking love or grief or any of his private emotions, was enough to make him blush. "I could n't," he said. "Really— I know I could n't." It was rather a joke to masquerade, unknown to the public, in the ranks of the silent; but imagine— He looked out at the leading man making stage love to the leading woman in a voice to reach the galleries.— Imagine him doing *that*!

"Well, for goodness' sake," she said, "what *do* you want to do? And why don't you find out, and go ahead and do it?"

"I am. I want to live. And I *am* living."

"That 's all very well for the present—but what about your future? You don't intend to be a super all your life?"

"I don't intend anything, any more," he replied contentedly. "I 'm tired of planning futures that never work out. Things will develop in their own way. I 'm not troubling about them."

She turned away from him with a gesture of exasperation which he did not understand; and she went from him to Pittsey who had been watching Don and her together with the mild curiosity that was natural to him.

He had been wondering why she remained so long an "extra" in this company, instead of finding a better engagement with some other, now that the season had well begun and all the stages were busy. When he asked her whether she had any prospect of a "part," she answered, languidly, "No,"—as if she had lost her interest and her ambition. He had learned—from Miss Arden—that she was eking out her small salary by posing during the day, in costume, for magazine illustrators. He had learned also that she and Don had made a morning excursion together to the Bronx. And when he tried to rouse her from the indifferent silence which she maintained with him, he found that she responded most readily to talk of Don.

"You used to know him, in Canada, did n't you?"

"Yes," she said, "I 've known him since the first day he came to school—a little fellow in black-velvet knickerbockers—and a Scotch cap. When my sister introduced him to me, he said 'How do you do?' with a little old-fashioned bow that impressed me so much I 've never forgotten it. I could n't open my mouth to him after that."

When Pittsey spoke of the pleasure which Don seemed to find in his "suping," she replied: "He ought to make an actor. I remember at school once, in the winter, he pretended he was dead and the boys buried him in a snow bank. They almost smothered him. And how I cried when I saw them doing it! . . . He was sent home for having snow down his neck and up his sleeves and in his ears."

She relapsed into a sort of staring meditation. He

did not break in upon it, a little ashamed of having gone about to spy on her secret.

X

On the forenoon of the following Sunday—a fresh September morning that came cool at the end of a hot week—Don and she rode to Central Park together, on top of a Fifth Avenue stage. The street was busy with its "church parade," with its holiday traffic, with its throngs of sightseers and visitors to town; the bus was as crowded as an excursion boat; and the wind that blew down the clean pavement—newly washed with rain—floated the lashes of the cabbies' whips, fluttered laces and feathers and the extravagant veils of "Fall millinery," tossed black coat-tails, caught at top hats, and moulded over feminine small knees the flowing draperies of clinging skirts. Under the glinting sunlight, it gave movement and animation to the solemnity of Sunday finery and curiosity's slow stare. It sparkled like a breeze on water. It rocked the church bells in a continuous chime.

She leaned back against the back of their seat, looking down on the bravery of fashion inscrutably, her face made more beautiful by the softening blur of her brown veil. Don clung to his perch, bending forward, in all ungraceful angles, his head continually turning, and clutching at his hat. The hollow rumble of the bus axles, jolting in their hubs, thrilled him with the return

of a childish excitement; for it was the sound that the circus wagons had made, passing in a street parade which he had seen when he had been no taller than the glittering spokes of the gilded wagon wheels. And although he did not recall any conscious memory of that gala day, the magic of the sound made the world poetical again, made every woman's face beautiful to him, every couple in a hansom cab a pair of smiling lovers, every glimpse of the lives around him the enticing illustration of a story-book of romances of which the pages were being turned so rapidly that he could not read.

"This is the way *I 'd* like to go through life," he cried. "Would n't you?" And when she did not seem to understand, he explained, with a wave of the hand: "Up above it all, where nobody notices you—looking down at it as you go by."

She nodded, content to humour him in whatever he said.

"I would n't like to climb down into it—even into one of those carriages." A liveried coachman and footman, like sentinels on their box, drove past with a bored couple in an open landau. "Imagine living under guard, like *that!*" he laughed. A butler stood at attention beside a door which he had opened for an old lady whom a footman was escorting solemnly down the steps. "In a brownstone prison like *that!*" An automobile came slowly toward them, quivering impatiently with the pulse of its checked engine, crawling among the cabs and carriages, a stout man beside the chauffeur shaking corpulently with the vibration of the machine.

"Though I should rather like *that!*" The man looked up at the roof seats of the stage, as if in a habit of observation which nothing escaped; and for the appreciable moment of passing, Don returned a stare that seemed suddenly to focus on him, and stay set, as if waiting for a nod of recognition.

The machine shot forward into an opening between the two streams of carriages; the man, still staring, disappeared with a backward jerk of the head that brought his hand up to the brim of his hat. Don said: "He thought he knew me!" But as soon as he had said it, he saw that it had been she at whom the stare had been directed; and he saw, too, that the recognition had not been welcome. He scrutinized the memory of the man's face—a clean-shaven plump face with protruding eyeballs that were round under skinny eyelids, like a bird's. He wondered to what scenes of her unknown past this unexpected apparition belonged.

She did not speak. He felt that she was separated from him by her thoughts, and he amused himself with the faces he saw and the houses he passed,—wilfully fixing his attention, with a microscopic intensity, on the intricate design of a lace curtain in a window, on the twisted scroll-work of an iron gate, on a child in a blue reefer and brown leather gaiters, on a policeman with a swollen nose that shone in the sunlight—picking out details as if with a search-light and seeing them so brilliantly that it seemed he had never seen such things before. This game carried him to the end of their ride; and when they had climbed down from the driver's box,

over the rim and hub of the wheel, he stood beside her on the curbstone, stiff, and with a strange sensation of having lost his outlook and reduced his height. He looked down at his legs. "They feel so short," he said. "I feel as if I had been cut off at the knees."

When he returned his thoughts to her, a little ashamed of his whimsicality, he found her drawn back from the approach of an automobile in which he recognized the man who had stared at her. The chauffeur stopped the machine beside them. The man raised his hat, smiling familiarly. "Jump in and have a ride."

She replied, in her coldest tones: "No, thank you."

"What are you doing now?"

"Mr. Gregg," she said, "this is Mr. Polk."

Polk merely nodded. "Yes. How d' you do?" He passed his eyes over Don—from the faded band of his hat to the worn hem of his trouser legs—with the same absent-minded observation which Don had noticed in him before. He said: "Been in to see Jimmy lately? He 's making up a couple of road companies. How 've you been, eh? You 're looking tip-top."

"Mr. Gregg is from Canada, too," she said, turning to Don with the politest smile.

"On the stage?"

"Yes. It was such a beautiful morning we could n't resist the top seat on it."

Polk blinked rapidly. "Oh? Yes. Well— Go ahead, Jack. See you later."

The automobile coughed, exploded and kicked forward with a jerk. Polk waved his hand indifferently—and was gone again.

Don looked after him, bewildered by this unexpected arrival, this absurd conversation and this abrupt departure. "Why! . . He must have followed us!"

"This is our gate, is n't it?" She stepped down into the roadway. "Is the Museum open on Sunday mornings?"

He followed her. "Who is he?"

"Peter Polk."

Don had seen the name on the bill boards. "The playwriter?"

"If you wish to call them plays."

"You 've—"

She interrupted: "I would sooner talk of something pleasant—if you don't mind." As they turned into a by-path, she added apologetically: "I don't want the thought of him to spoil our morning." She raised her veil, tying it around the crown of her hat, took off her gloves, tucked them into her belt and opened her parasol over herself and Don as if deliberately conferring on him the intimacy of smiles and friendship which she had refused to Polk. "Is n't this jolly!"

She was strikingly dressed in shades of brown—even to her parasol, her veil and her russet shoes—and every passer-by paid her the tribute of an admiring stare. She appeared so unconscious of this that Don was free to enjoy it for her, to be flattered for her, and to enjoy also the feeling it gave him of passing, distinguished but indifferent, above the gaze of the world. With the graceful carriage of a stage beauty, she walked untiringly, through the shady windings of the paths, under tall elms, among grey beeches of which the leaves were

yellowing, between the reddening hedges of underbrush from which the squirrels peeped. She was amused by his knowledge of the paths to be taken. She admired every little view of wood and water which he pointed out. She gave herself up to the simple pleasures of the moment with a charming unreserve that was like a continual compliment to him.

He had never seen her so light-hearted before, and never so uncritically friendly in her acceptance of his opinions and his points of view. Although she said nothing of that part of her life to which Polk belonged, she recalled almost wistfully her past in Coulton, including Don in her memories and astonishing him again by the vividness of her recollection of his small doings. She had been in that photograph of the Sunday school picnic in which he had been posed among so many little girls that "Miss Margaret" had been jealous of them; she remembered, from the teasing he had suffered in school, how he had given that picture to a girl who had destroyed it; and she confessed that she had hated "the little wretch." When he was somewhat blushingly surprised that she had been so interested in him, even so long ago, she said: "Oh, Edith used to come home and talk at the table about the queer little boy she was teaching. I knew all about you long before I ever met you. We used to wonder what you would be when you grew up."

"I 'm afraid. . . I 'm rather a disappointment."

"You are—in some ways," she replied lightly. "In other ways you 're not."

"What ways?"

"Oh, now," she laughed, "that would be telling."

He joined in her amusement. "I know," he said, "I 'm an awful ass. I 've tried to change—really, I have—but I can't do it. I wake up next morning and find myself back where I began. Your sister—my father—Bert Pittsey—everyone has tried to help me, but they can't. I 'll get into trouble, some day, I know."

"We all do that."

"Yes, but you try to avoid it. I seem to walk right into it with my eyes shut."

"Never mind. Don't let us worry about it."

"I don't!" he said. "That 's the trouble!"

"Well," she sighed, "some days I think you 're right. You are on a morning like this, anyway!"

SHE even accepted his invitation to have luncheon at the "Terrace," and protected him from extravagance by giving a ridiculous order of oysters and ice-cream—making a joke of it, enjoying with him the amazement of the waiter, ignoring the curiosity of the people about her and devoting her eyes to Don as if they two were alone in a solitary holiday of sunshine and autumn trees.

"Now what shall we do?" he asked, while the waiter was gone for his change.

"Get a package of cigarettes," she whispered, as if proposing a forbidden wickedness, "and we 'll go where you can have a quiet smoke."

He laughed. "I know the very place!—as good as a hay-loft!"

It was around an arm of the lake, at the foot of an unfrequented path that led to the water's edge and

ended beside a clump of syringa bushes and a rustic bench. "The very place," she agreed. "Is n't it lovely to be out among real trees, instead of painted stage imitations! And the ducks, too!" She sat down, making herself comfortable, as if for a long tête-a-tête. "Now light up and talk to me. . . Tell me— Tell me why you left college?"

She turned toward him, sideways in the seat, her back against the arm of it, studying him unobserved, with an expression of face that might have put him on his guard if he had seen it.

He drew the first contented puffs of his cigarette and replied: "I don't believe I can. It was all mixed up. I felt I was wasting my time there. I wanted to be at work. Conroy and Pittsey were leaving together, coming to New York. I had quarreled with my father about not studying law. Then besides—" He stopped, confused. "There were other things. I thought someone — Oh, I could n't tell you. It was all mixed up. I misunderstood, I guess. I made a mistake."

At his "I thought someone"—her eyes widened on him, unwinking, with the almost painful eagerness of a sportsman who has seen the stirring of his game. She waited so.

He smoked in a silent embarrassment that was, in itself, a confession of the truth. He was thinking of that parting on the steps of the Kimball porch, of his blank despair, and of Margaret sobbing in the darkness.

She said, at last: "Your father did n't wish to send you to college, did he?"

"No. . . I had failed on my entrance exams."

"I remember. . . Yes. That was the spring that Miss— What was her name?— I remember seeing you, often, on Park street with her."

"Miss Richardson!"

She did not appear to notice his surprise. She seemed indifferently interested in the toe of her shoe, which she was prodding with the point of her parasol. "What became of her?"

"She 's in Germany—studying music. Did you know her?"

"No. I knew the family she was stopping with—next door to your aunt's. . . Is she going to be abroad long?"

"I—I don't know. I suppose so. If they can stay. I think they 've been rather unfortunate—about money."

She said gently: "She seemed such a sweet girl."

She raised to him again that penetrating and watchful scrutiny. He was unaware of it, gazing out at the water. Her tone, as if speaking only of the past—"She was such a sweet girl"—had recalled to him all the dear tremors of those days that seemed so far away, that were so hopelessly ended. In a flash of thought, he saw himself, now, drifting in a life that promised him no future, a "super," earning 75 cents a night, without any prospect of advancement and resigned to his failure in this city that had no work for him. The interval that had passed since he had left her, had not brought them nearer together; it had separated them by every unsuccessful effort that he had made to earn the right to love her. He saw her as the impossible prize of a contest in which he had been a loser. He saw

her, surrounded by a light of lost dreams, immeasurably beyond him, a hope that was past.

His face twitched with a twinge that seemed to strike from his heart. To Miss Morris, it was the face of a boy who had been disappointed in love, who had thrown away his career and left college because "someone" had taken the young hope out of his future and left him merely "living now"—as he had said—without plan, without ambition. She smiled, but tenderly, at the folly of it. How like him it was!

He was startled by the touch of her hand on his arm—the hand in which she held her gloves. He thought that she was giving them to him, and he took them absent-mindedly. "Put them in your pocket for me," she said. "I 'm afraid I 'll lose them."

He wondered why she was blushing.

He was to wonder at her again when they parted at the door of Mrs. Kahrle's boarding-house. "I 've had *such* a good time," she said. "Have *you*? Have you been happy?" And when he assured her that he had been, she added: "That 's good. I enjoyed myself so much." She shook hands, lingering with a manner of having something still unspoken. "Don't worry—about things—you know. They 'll all come out right, won't they?"

"I hope so," he replied, puzzled.

"That 's right," she said. "Good-bye." Her smile dwelt on him as if she were trying to say with her eyes some encouragement which she had, apparently, not put into words. "Good-bye—till to-morrow."

XI

He did not try to understand what it was that lay glimmering at the bottom of that deep look of hers. Her talk of Coulton and of "Miss Richardson" had put before him a whole picture of his life, from the days when he had played with little "Miss Margaret" in the broken summer-house, down to the last written words which he had received from her in Leipzig; and he went back over it all, incident by incident, and chapter by chapter, as if it were a printed story of which he had yet to read the end. Was it possible that, so far as *she* was concerned, it was already ended? Was she gone out of his life forever? Was his future to be a disjoined series of new incidents to which she would be a stranger?

He revolted against the thought as if against a change in his own identity. Surely love could not be such an impotent tragedy. Surely he was not wrecked here in a life that had settled down to mere aimless regret. Surely it was a very law of existence that his future should be a development of his past. He said to himself that it must be so, that it *should* be so, that he would make it so. With a determined effort he threw off the depression that had fastened on him; and by a trick of imagination he made himself feel a confident expectation that Margaret would come back to him and that his life would continue to fulfil the promise with which it had begun.

When he returned to his rooms, both the Pittseys were

out, and he opened his trunk and began to re-read his collection of her letters, brooding over them fondly and striving to recall every detail of this past that had threatened to escape him. He opened the back of his watchcase, to find that her face was almost lost in the lustrous brown of the "unfixed" proof, as if it, too, were trying to fade away from him! And he sat gazing at it—in an attempt to stamp it forever on the memory of his retina—until the light had quite obliterated it. Then he closed his eyes and smiled when he saw the after-image of her face, glancing aside in the pose of girlish shyness which he loved. *That* picture should never fade. He would summon it back every hour of the day, so that it might be glowing in the darkness when he gave himself up to the last sleepy thoughts of her at night.

She would return to him from Europe; he would be waiting, ready for her, in some position which should not be unworthy of her; their lives would join in a happy completion of the destiny foreshadowed by their past. Of that he made himself feel sure. For he was not merely an unconscious idealist, now; he was becoming a visionary. He not only believed in what was the unsupported tissue of his hope; he was making the hope itself and then believing in it.

It occurred to him—when he met Miss Morris on the stage again, and was greeted by her with an almost eager smile—that she had just such a confidence in him, and that she had intended to let him know as much in her parting from him on Sunday afternoon. He felt that he had shared his past with her; that she had

watched him always with interest; and that she believed in him still.

"Well, what have you been doing?" she asked, as soon as they were paired off in their promenade.

"I 've been making plans."

"Have you? What sort?"

"Why—I feel that I 've been drifting. I 've been trying to take a course again, and sail it."

She said, feelingly: "Oh, I 'm *so* glad! What have you decided to do?"

She surprised him by the warmth of her curiosity, questioning him with an eagerness that had an air of triumph, as if she had tried to awaken his ambition and was flattered by her success. He guessed that she too had been planning for him; and he said: "I have n't found out. Tell me—can't you suggest something?"

"Oh, a thousand things!" She laughed. "For instance, here you are, behind the scenes, watching the machinery of a play—with a college education and lots of imagination, I know. Why don't you begin to write plays?"

"Like Peter Polk?" he joked.

She winced. "Please—Please—"

"I beg your pardon. . . Do you really mean it?"

"Most certainly. Why not? You could act, if you would let yourself—but if you don't want to come out and 'read' lines yourself, you certainly can't object to writing them for others. And I 'm sure you could do it."

He trussed himself up with his cane, holding it across his back in the crooks of his elbows, and frowning out

at the parade of supers in the calcium light. "I tried to write—newspaper stuff—for Bert Pittsey. And I could n't do it at all."

"Newspaper stuff!" she said contemptuously. "No! But surely you could write the dialogue of a play. Look at that Polk. He can hardly write a readable letter. But he knows how people talk, and he knows how to put them on the stage."

He looked around at her in sudden surprise. "Do you know," he said, "I believe I could! I used to make them up—plays—for figures cut out of pictures—pictures from the old 'Graphic'—long ago. Would n't it be fun!—if I could!"

She touched him on the arm, to start him out for their turn in the procession. "Of course you could. It 's the very thing you *could* do. It 's what Edith said when she heard you were going to study law—that you had too much imagination for law or business or anything else unless you took to poetry. And no one can make a living out of poetry, whereas Polk has made thousands of dollars out of his 'Tommy Tenderfoot' alone. . . I thought of it once, myself, and got a lot of books on the technique of the Drama and all that. —I 'll let you have them, if you wish.— But I had no invention. I had to fall back on trying to dramatize novels. While *you*—"

He scarcely heard her. His imagination had leaped to her suggestion like a child to a new toy. To earn his living by writing plays! It would be a game of "pretend" such as he had used to play with Frankie. It would be played in this glittering world of the

theater, away from office drudgery and the slavery of business, above all the deceits and conventions and sufferings and vices of real life, looking down on the work-a-day world—as he had looked down from the top of the Fifth Avenue stage—with Margaret beside him, in an endless happiness. He felt that a door which he had been groping for in darkness had suddenly been opened to him. It was work—a future—everything!

"It—it would be great!" he said. "Would n't it?"

"It would be the very thing for *you*. I wonder you did n't think of it yourself."

He smiled up at the calcium light, as if it were the wholesome sunshine on his face. "I could n't see any future for me here—and still I liked it so much. I hated to leave it. I did n't know what to do."

The cry from the jeweler's counter broke in on them. They exchanged parting smiles as they were separated by the crowd—the smile of congratulation and the smile of ambition; for Don, at last, had found an object and a task in life.

He walked to her door, that night, to borrow her few books; and he went to the Astor Library, next morning, to look over the list of volumes on the "Drama." He was not discouraged when he found hundreds of titles under that head; the more guides, he thought, the surer traveling. He confided to Walter Pittsey that he had serious thoughts of trying to write a play, and Pittsey nodded: "Why not?" He had been through the playwriting period himself, and was tolerant.

"There 's a pile of money in it," Bert Pittsey said, "and you 're nearer it in the theater than the rest of us outside."

"I don't care so much about the money," Don replied. "It 's the—the fun of it."

"Oh go on," Bert replied. "Take the money. You may need it some day."

"All right," Don laughed. "Since you *are* so pressing."

He was in high spirits. He took optimistically the news from his mother that Frankie's departure for college had left the house very empty, and that Conroy was giving Uncle John so much trouble that the "poor man" looked ten years older. It would all come out right. Everything would come out right. He tried to cheer Miss Morris with that hope when she caught the rib-point of her umbrella in the gauze netting of the jeweler's window and was called a "fool" by the stage manager. "I *am* a fool," she said bitterly, "for having brought myself down to the level of such beasts."

"Never mind," he joked. "When we get that play written, you 'll have the 'lead' to do, and you 'll help me abuse the stage manager."

"You 'll have forgotten me by that time."

"Forgotten you! Oh say, what do you think I am!"

They were sitting at their table under their stage tree. She looked around her scornfully at her neighbors. "I think you 're the only person here I 'd—I 'd care to be remembered by."

"That 's pleasant!"

She turned her eyes to him. "It 's true."

It struck him that she had changed since their first meeting, that she had come to the surface, that she was no longer hidden behind the mask of her beauty; for

the expression of face with which she said "It 's true!" was alive with a sort of proud emotion that confessed friendship and invited its return.

He said, humbly: "It 's—It 's mighty good of you to say so. You 've been kindness itself to me here."

She put her elbows on the table and leaned forward toward him in her chair. "Because I wanted you to like me," she said in a low voice. "Do you? . . . . Because," she went on fiercely, "I 've hated myself so —in this life here—that I thought you would despise me. And I—I 've done despicable things. Polk—he was in one of them—before I learned what such men are. You don't know. You can't—because you 're—you 're different."

He tried to speak, with a confused smile.

"No," she said, with the same desperate rapidity of utterance, "don't say that. Don't say anything. I 'm —they 've— That brute has upset me. I should n't be saying such things. I can't help it. I—I have to speak or I shall be crying. Don't look at me." He fixed his eyes on the floor, bewildered. "I hated everyone. I looked at them and hated them. It 's your fault that—" She choked. "You must n't judge me. You came to me from Coulton, and that afternoon at Fort George—from the life I 'd run away from—and you spoke to me from it. It was *that*. That 's why I wanted you to go away, to go home—and you would n't. And I was n't strong enough—myself—I wanted to see you and talk to you. You must n't judge me. You can't —you can't understand. It 's—"

The cue came: "Lady Whortley, the tenantry are

waiting on the lawn." When Don looked up, she was lost in the exit of the supers.

He followed her, amazed by this outburst, which he could not understand. He wished to assure her that *of course* he liked her; that he had always had the greatest admiration and respect for her; that, if he had not shown it, it was because he had been a little in awe of her. As for her accusations against herself, they were foolish (he would tell her). She must not let herself think such things. She was everything that was high-minded, he knew. It was only her own over-sensitiveness that accused her of imaginary defects.

He tried to meet her in the wings, but she avoided him by not coming from the women's dressing-room until the instant that she was to go on the stage; and the play kept them separated there. He decided to meet her at the stage entrance and escort her to her boarding-house; but when the last curtain had fallen and he hurried to the supers' dressing-room to get into his street clothes, he found that Walter Pittsey and Mr. Kidder were waiting to speak to him. "I 'm going to Boston," Pittsey explained, "to open an agency for Mr. Kidder. He wants you to take charge here, in my place. What do you say?"

"Why—why, yes, of course," Don stammered, as if reluctantly. "If Mr. Kidder wants me to—"

Kidder, instead of being offended—as Pittsey seemed to fear he might be—put in, rather apologetically: "I 'm going to have something better for you, pretty soon. You look after these boys, now. See that they take care of their costumes; that 's the main thing.

Pittsey 'll explain all that. Come and see me to-morrow morning and I 'll give you the new pay roll. Two of the boys are quitting to-night." He patted Don on the shoulder, flatteringly, as he turned away. "I got something up my sleeve for *you.*"

Don had to remain with Pittsey until the last of the "boys" had departed and the last article of their wardrobe had been hung on its appointed hook; and then Walter accompanied him on his way back to their rooms, giving him instructions in his duties as time-keeper and "head of the supers." "It 's ten a week, you know," Pittsey said, "and a chance to get some sort of little 'thinking part' if one turns up. You do the square thing by Kidder, and he 'll shove you."

"Shall I have the—the same place on the stage, with Miss Morris?" Don asked.

Pittsey smiled at a street lamp. "Certainly—unless, as I said, the stage manager wants some one to do a little bit and asks Kidder—or puts you into it, himself. You 'll not have anything new to do, immediately—except in the dressing-rooms. One of the new men will take my place in the ranks."

"Oh, I see," Don said, relieved. He added, on second thoughts: "I 'm sorry you 're going. I 'll be lost without you."

Pittsey laughed. "Oh, *you* 'll get along."

"I don't mean that," Don said. "I don't—care about that. You 've been so— If it had n't been for you—"

"That 's all right, old man," Pittsey put in, hastily. "I 'm only worried about the apartment—about my share in it. I—" He turned to watch a passing car,

with a pretended interest, touched by Don's gratitude but nervously afraid of this expression of it.

Don said, out of the silence: "I wish Miss Morris . . . was n't a woman."

"Was n't a—"

"So that she could take it. You and she—you 're the best friends I 've had. She does n't seem very happy, alone that way." Pittsey looked at him with a quizzical lift of the eyebrow; but he went on, innocently: "It 's pretty hard for a girl. I 'd give anything to be able to help her the way you did me. We get on so well together, too. . . Funny thing—to-night—she thought I did n't like her."

He spoke as if he were thinking aloud; and Pittsey, as if ashamed of overhearing him, checked him with: "Perhaps Bert 'll know some one—to come in with you."

As they turned up the old and broken brownstone steps that mounted from the street to the front door of their lodgings, Don said: "For that matter—now that I 'm getting ten a week—we could keep the place for you till you come back." And Walter was still remonstrating against this folly, when they entered the "dining-room" and were confronted by Conroy, soiled and disheveled, eating at the table.

XII

He had run away from home; that was evident at once from the sulky and defiant way in which he received

their surprised greetings. "Why, what happened?" Don cried. He answered, brutally: "I don't know that it 's any of *your* business." He continued eating in a surly indifference to them, as if they were a pair of intruders. They stood awkwardly, staring at him, until Walter Pittsey, with a shrug of the shoulder, turned into the other room. Don heard him talking in low tones to his brother, who was already in bed. There were only three beds—three cots—so narrow that it was impossible for more than one person to sleep in any one of them.

"You might have let us know that you were coming," Don said.

"I don't have to report my movements to you. I 'm done with you. You mind your own affairs and I 'll mind mine."

Don sat down, sick at heart. Conroy finished his supper and shoved back his chair. He swayed and stumbled as he crossed to the bedroom door. He threw it open with his foot, and went in to his cot—the cot in which Walter Pittsey had been sleeping. He sat down on the side of it and began to take off his shoes.

Walter came out. "Well," he said, as he shut the door behind him, "this is no place for me."

"No," Don replied, "nor for me either. I might as well get out now. I can't live here—not with this sort of thing."

"Nonsense! He 'll be all right in the morning. He 'll sleep it off."

"No. . . No. . . He thinks I— It 's no use. You know what I did. I did it because I had to—but

he 'll never forgive it. I might as well get out now. It 'll be a dog's life. Where are you going?"

"Don't be absurd." He put down his hat. "I 'm not going any place. Lend me your mattress, and I 'll sleep on the floor."

Don shook his head.

"But if he needed looking after—before," Pittsey coaxed, "he 'll need it a hundred times more *now*. He won't have a sou to pay rent. You don't intend to leave it all to Bert, do you?"

"No, but—"

"Well, then, don't be foolish. Lend me your mattress and a blanket, and I 'll sleep here."

"It's no use," Don said. "I can't stay."

However, after a weakening argument, he compromised by sleeping on the floor himself, giving Walter the bare springs of the cot—which they had carried out into the dining-room. He heard Conroy snoring in a heavy stupor through the night; and in the morning he was willing to accept his cousin's enmity as freeing him from a responsibility which he did not feel himself able to discharge.

Their breakfast was a constrained and unhappy meal, in spite of Bert Pittsey's attempt to make a joke of the night's discomforts. "Your back must look like a waffle, Walt," he laughed, "with the pattern of those springs on it."

"Well," Walter replied, "I did n't notice you putting yourself out any."

Bert flushed at his brotherly dig. Conroy carried himself as if Walter had been justly punished for his

impertinent intrusion on the apartment. Don refused to join in any attempts to achieve a more companionable mood. They finished the meal as they had begun it.

Don helped Walter to pack his trunk and accompanied him to Kidder's office; and when they had said good-bye at the railway station, Don went to the library and sat down to his books with a sigh of relief. He felt that he had returned to solitude, and he was glad of it. He was ready, now, for his future, his salary assured and his work before him.

He spent the greater part of the day in the library, lunching at a ten-cent restaurant so as to avoid a midday meeting with Conroy. He did not think of Miss Morris, until he met her on the stage, that night; and then she was so smilingly oblivious to what had passed between them on the previous evening that he was unable to refer to it. They talked about his play-writing, about his new responsibilities in the dressing-room, about Conroy's return and about Walter Pittsey's departure; and he looked out on the world of his stage work and his petty worries from the charmed circle of her friendship, feeling himself solaced and protected in it.

When he received a letter from his uncle, asking him to take charge of $30 a month for Conroy's maintenance, on the old conditions, he talked this letter over with her; and they agreed that it would be better to have Conroy independent of him. "Get them to send it to the other Pittsey," she advised. "He 'll only quarrel with you more than ever."

"That 's so," he said. "Bert has his confidence still. And he may know how to handle him."

But Pittsey did not look on the proposal with any favor. "I don't exactly relish being keeper to a remittance man myself," he objected. "Why can't they send *him* the money, if they want him to have it?"

"Well, for one thing, he 'd not keep enough of it to pay his rent here."

"That 's so," Pittsey reflected. "But I 'd have to fix it up some way so that he won't turn sour on me, too."

"Fix it any way you please," Don said. "I can't do anything with him, and if we don't take the money for him, we 'll either have to pay for him ourselves or turn him out on the street."

Don wrote his uncle and explained the situation; and Mr. McLean, in his reply, accepted the inevitable. "He must not return," he wrote. "I will not have his mother worried. I will send enough for his support. Perhaps if we let him go his own gait he will come out all right. Keep him out of trouble. If anything goes wrong, write me."

Don accepted these instructions as releasing him from all but the most casual supervision, and he returned eagerly to his books. From reading of how to write plays, he had begun to read plays themselves; and he haunted old book shops for the second-hand volumes of "plays for amateurs and professionals," and carried them about in his pockets and studied them on the benches of the public squares or under the falling leaves of Central Park. The only dramas which he could see performed were at the few theaters that gave matinees on other days than Wednesdays and Saturdays; for on those latter afternoons he was on the stage himself. But he found an

extravaganza called "The Enchanted Castle" that had a matinee on Thursday; and this gorgeous spectacle appealed to him like a fairy tale.

The dramas that depicted life did not invite him to attempt any imitation of them, but he felt that it would be a pure joy to plan such a play as this "Enchanted Castle"; and he amused himself by picturing a ballet for it—not in the "wizard's cavern," but in the great hall of an ice palace, of which all the floors were shining ice, transparently blue; and the walls were blocks of snow, like a white marble, sparkling in raised designs of frost; and from the arched ceilings hung great chandeliers that were pendant icicles supporting a myriad of lights; and on a throne that looked as if it had been carved from a frozen waterfall, sat the goddess of Winter, in ermine and white velvets, holding her wand of silver tipped with a great pearl, and looking down on her Amazons with their icy breastplates and their frost-spangled skirts. He was returning, unconsciously, to all he had ever imagined of Santa Claus's palace that stood on the top of a mountainous iceberg and was peopled by fairies who arrived and departed on floating clouds. He imagined Winter as a neglected divinity who envied the praises which mankind and especially the poets, gave to her sisters of the Spring, the Summer and the Autumn. He saw the Prince, her devoted lover, in a drifted forest (that was his ravine at Coulton on a larger scale) sitting on some broken fir branches with a dog crouched in the snow beside him—when suddenly the dog barked and he looked up to see that the side of the hill had opened

just where there had stood a huge rock dripping with ice, and from this cave a band of nymphs rushed out and surrounded him with a circle of spears—and then Winter herself came into the sunlight and waved them back and said: "For this is he!"

She had come to reward him for his devotion!

He gathered up his books from the reading table, returned them at the library desk, and hurried out to the street to be alone among the multitudes of the city with this new make-believe.

She led him into her underground palace—which proved to be an Aladdin's cave encrusted with precious stones set in ice—its floors covered with the skins of polar bears, its walls shining with theatrical stalactites like the wizard's cavern; and when they were alone in a wonderful secret chamber out of the Arabian Nights, they sat down to a Homeric feast of nectar and ambrosia. She told him how she had watched over him in the woods, patting him on the cheeks with snow flakes and caressing him with the winds. She had longed to speak to him, but—but intercourse with mortals was forbidden by the gods; and now, having sworn her attendant nymphs to secrecy, she was daring all the angers of Olympus by making herself visible to him and receiving him here in this enchanted cave which she had made for him unknown to Jupiter.

He walked up Broadway, listening to her complaints of loneliness, of the disregard of men who had become afraid of her since they began to herd together in cities and avoid the bracing airs and healthful exercises of the winter; and he tried to console her with his own

fervent admiration, reminding her of his life-long adoration and his love of the snow. She interrupted him with a melancholy smile, to say: "And you—even you—will forget me. The city will take you. You will build a home and sit by your fireside with your wife and children, and shudder when you hear me calling to you mournfully outside among the frozen drifts."

"Here you! Look where yuh're goin', will yuh?" A policeman thrust him back from "Dead Man's Curve," as a cable car swung around it with a frantic clang of its gong. "D' yuh want to go home 'n an amb'lance!"

He picked up his hat, and brushing it with his coat sleeve as he went, he hurried to the safety of the benches in the center of the square. There he sat down with his drama, still trembling from the fright, but still smiling excitedly. He saw himself pleading with her to take him away from the world which he despised, to keep him with her hidden. He saw that she would not be able to resist him. She would carry him—on a cloud—to her summer palace in the unexplored North. A jealous nymph would betray her. The ballet in the great hall would be interrupted by the arrival of Jupiter, with stage thunder. The gods would sentence her to lose her immortality and her throne; she would return with him to the world, where they would live together—through the last act—in a little cottage in the woods. And she—because she shared with him the common menace of death and was linked to him by a doom that made love a fearful and precarious joy—she would be

more happy, now, than she had ever been in the splendid ennui of her divinity.

It was, to him, the plot of a great play. He was blind to the incongruity of his Santa Claus palace and his Homeric mythology; he saw nothing unworthy in his chorus-girl nymphs; he accepted it all as a thing so beautiful that it almost brought tears to his eyes. He hastened to his rooms to put the outlines of it on paper before he should forget them; and he noticed, then, for the first time, that it had begun to rain.

He found, in his box, a letter from Margaret. "Dear Don," it read, "we are coming home. I can't tell you. It 's mother's fault. Mr. Berwick warned her against doing just what she did and now the money's gone and I 'm glad of it because the worry 's over. I 'm trying to be brave and not frightened, but I wish you were here to tell me what to do. I 'll have to earn my own living, you know. If there 's anything left it will not be more than enough for her. I want to see you as soon as we get to New York. I 'm sure you'll be able to tell me. You *must* because I *won't* go back home and take music pupils and wear made-over dresses like Maud Browning, and the only thing is to find something in New York. I can sing, you know, and play a little, and there ought to be *something.*

"I must tell you, though, not to meet me at the boat because I quarreled with mother about a man here. You never saw such shoes as he wore! He actually dared to ask mother if he could marry me without ever asking *me* what *I* thought about it and I believe she wanted me to because he had money. I did n't dare to

tell her so, but I told her I would n't *look* at him if he were the only man in the world. She behaved shamefully about it. I 'm going to make her leave me in New York when she goes up to Canada to see if Mr. Berwick can't do anything for us and I 'll write to you when she 's gone because you know ever since Mrs. Kimball wrote her about the time we were out together *that day* she has been saying things about you and perhaps she would n't leave me if she knew *you,* awful you, were in the city. Have a plan ready for me. You were always good at plans, were n't you? I know this letter is *frightfully* mixed up but I have to have it posted before she comes back from buying the tickets and I have no time to read it over. I hope you will be glad to see me. *I* shall."

There was a postscript to say that if he were out of town "or anything," he was to write her, "Poste Restante," at the New York General Post Office.

He read the letter over to see what boat she was coming on, or when she had sailed. There was, of course, no word of it. The thought that she might have arrived already, on the same steamship as her letter, came on him in a warm tremble of weakness.

She was poor! She would have to earn her living—in New York—with him! They would be together, on the level of a common poverty! . . . He looked up from the letter with a stupefied expression of guilty joy; for he was as if only partly awakened from sleep, his brain was still befuddled with the imaginary scenes of his play, and he confused reality with the pictures of his dreams and accepted her letter as an announce-

ment that his goddess had been deprived of her divinity and exiled to earth with him.

The music publisher's sign on the door before him stared at him insistently. He blinked at it—as one might rub the eyes. Then he laughed, somewhat shamefacedly, and ran up the stairs, taking two of the steps at a time.

XIII

"WELL," Miss Morris said, "what is it?"

"What is—what?"

"Is it good news you 've had? Has someone left you a fortune? You 're very much less interested in *us* than you are in something that 's going on inside you."

Don looked confused. "It 's something I wanted to ask you about. I can't—not here." The lawn party was seated all around them. "It 's something private."

She studied him with an appearance of apprehension. "Has Mr. Kidder—"

"No, no. It 's nothing like that. Let me walk home with you to-night. I can't tell you here."

She looked down at the handle of her parasol and began to finger the tassel. She said nervously: "How are the plays getting on? Have you started to write one yet? I was thinking, the other day, of a good plot about —I can't remember— But you must have thought of hundreds by this time, have n't you?" Her smile seemed to tremble on her lips in a way he had never seen *her* smile flutter before.

"Why, yes! I thought of one to-day. What *was* it?" He laughed, for no reason, unless it was that she herself seemed on the point of laughter. "Let me see!"

"You 're like *me*. I can't remember mine. It was something about—"

"Oh, I know," he broke in. "It was like the thing I saw—'The Enchanted Castle.' It was about a Prince—"

He began to tell her, and she made a good pretence of listening, though her eyes would have betrayed her if she had raised them to him. She nodded or said "Yes?" to encourage him whenever he paused. He broke down with "Oh, I can't tell you. I have n't it clear yet. I—" She said: "Tell me on our way home to-night."

They rose together. "I may be kept," he explained, "in the dressing-room. Sometimes the boys—"

"I 'll wait," she said. "Don't try to hurry them."

He had kept her waiting at least five minutes, standing inside the stage entrance in her waterproof, listening to the rain. She wore a little cap with a red feather in it; her cheeks were burning. "Have you no umbrella?" she cried. "Or rubbers?"

"Yours will cover us both. It was n't raining very hard when I came. My shoes don't leak."

"But you *must* get rubbers," she scolded, letting him take her umbrella from her. "You 'll catch your death of cold."

He opened the door for her. "I 'll get them in the morning—first thing." He put up the umbrella and held it over her. She went up the street with him, lec-

turing him on the care of his health. At the corner, she took his arm and stopped him on the curb. "I 've half a mind to take a car," she said.

"No, don't," he coaxed. "I want—I have something to ask you. Let us get off Broadway. Let us walk up Fifth Avenue. It will be quieter."

"Well, promise me you 'll never do it again," she said, with a fond severity.

"Never again! Come on."

She tripped across the shining wet asphalt, on his arm, her skirts gathered above her ankles, as heedless of the rain as a Frenchwoman in a picture. When they came to the double file of electric globes that shone mistily, two by two, like a saluting guard, up the slope of Fifth Avenue, in the white obscurity of fog and rain, he said: "You remember—in the Park—the other day—you asked me about Miss Richardson?"

"Yes?"

"I 've just had a letter from her. She 's coming to New York."

"Oh?"

"She 'll have to earn her living. They 've lost whatever money they had. Her mother invested it—in stocks, I think. She wants me to tell her what to do—for work."

She had drawn back a little from him, at the first word of Miss Richardson, and a point of the umbrella had caught her cap. She felt her feather now—to see that it was not broken—and took his arm again. She asked: "What can she do?"

He explained the circumstances, as well as he could.

She listened, rather coldly. "What do you think?" he asked, at last.

"I think you should advise her to go back to Canada. I don't see that she could do anything here."

"Unless she went on the stage," he suggested. "With her singing—"

She cried out indignantly against such a proposal. He did not know what the stage was, for a girl! She would not want her worst enemy to take up *that* life. "It 's all right," she said, "if you 're born into it—if your parents are actors. But for an unprotected girl—like *her*—with no one to help her fight her battles—"

"I thought perhaps *you* 'd help her."

"Me? I can't fight my own! No. Tell her to stay at home. She 'll regret it every day of her life, if she does n't."

He gloomed at the pavement, in silence. She saw that he was disappointed. "Why should she bother you about it?" she demanded. "I thought she had quarrelled with you?"

"Quarrelled?"

"Yes. That day in the Park, you said—"

He shook his head. "She never quarrelled with me."

"You 're friends still—after what happened?"

"Nothing happened," he said. "I thought she—I misunderstood her, I suppose. It was my own fault."

"Then you want her to *come* here?"

Her tone did not warn him. "Ye-es," he confessed doubtfully, "if there 's anything she can do."

She had released his arm. "Why?" she asked, restraining herself. "What is it? What is there between you?"

"Nothing—on her side—except friendship."

She broke out angrily: "I thought you had more sense! To go on making yourself miserable about a girl that never cared two straws about you. I don't see what you see *in* her—what men ever see in girls like her—silly little creatures. She 's just using you—or wants to—because you 're here in New York and she thinks you can help her. She ruined your college—your course at college for you, and now she 'll—you 'll let her do the same thing here. I thought you had more sense!"

"Don't . . . say such things," he replied gently.

"I will!" she cried. "It 's the truth." She jerked the umbrella down in front of her against a slant of light from a street lamp. "It 'd be just like you to throw yourself away on a chit like that—who would n't half appreciate you."

"*Please,* don't," he pleaded. "I— You don't understand. I—"

"I will, too!" Her voice broke. "I think too much of you to see you doing such a thing without trying to stop you. Let her stay away—or let her go back to Canada. You were just beginning to get along all right again when she must come upsetting all our plans and making you miserable." She threw away all her dignity, all her reserve. "Have n't I tried to— Have n't I a right to— Don't you even care enough for me to—to let me tell you—to let me help you?"

"You don't know," he said. "You don't understand. She 's been—ever since I can remember—we 've been . . . My whole life has—has grown up with her. All that 's best—"

"And have n't I? Ever since you were a little fellow

—your first day at school—and ever since— And now, when we were— I won't let her! She has no more claim on you than anyone else. Friendship! She 'd throw you over in a minute, *would n't* she? Has she ever said— Has she ever promised—"

"It is n't her. It 's—myself." He glanced at her timidly, and saw only her mouth, in the white light of the electric globe before them, the rest of her face being in the shadow of the umbrella; but her lips were tragically drawn and twisted; and the sight of them silenced him. He understood that he was giving her pain—as he seemed to give everybody pain—his mother, his father, Margaret sobbing on the porch, his cousin Conroy, who hated him. He felt helplessly guilty, without knowing what it was in him that grieved and disappointed every one who had any affection for him.

"Well then," she said hoarsely, "I won't let *you*. You must n't do it. It 's some false idea of honor. I— Your other friends have—have rights, too. You owe us something." She had regained some sort of control of herself with an effort that left her voice uncertain, unstrung. "You have been trying to wreck your whole life on account of her. You failed in your examinations for the university—with her. You ran away from college—on account of her. And now you want to— It 's a shame!" She turned with him into the cross street on which she lived, and taking his arm again, she said: "Don't you even think enough of me to take *my* advice? Are n't we even—even friends enough for that?"

"You 're everything that 's— You 're the best friend I ever had."

"Well then, let me be *that*. Let me help you. I 'm sure I care for you more than she does. And if you 'll do things for her, why can't you do them for *me*?"

"I will. I—"

"Then give her up. Let her go. If she has no more than friendship for you, let *me* give you that. What is there—" He felt her trembling against his arm. "What do you—want her to be? Ask *me*— I 'll—" Her voice gave out in a whisper, ashamed.

"Oh, please—" Her kindness, her affectionate kindness, almost brought tears to his eyes. "I 'm always— I make every one miserable. I disappoint every one."

"No, you—you would n't now. Not after *that*." She spoke as if through blood in her throat. "You would n't make me ashamed. You 're too—"

They stood at the foot of her steps, the rain beating on the umbrella. He could see her face only as a white dimness. "T-take the umbrella," she said, her teeth chattering. "I 'm so cold. The rain 's so cold. I— Don't—" Her hand found his in the darkness, and he felt it shaking. . . . "Good—". . . She turned with a little hysteric catch of breath that was half a sob, and she stumbled heavily up the steps, bent forward as if the climb were a mile high.

He could not see her in the shadow of the doorway. He thought he heard her voice. Then the door shut with a sharp, nervous suddenness.

He began to walk home, wet and shivering, through the drenched streets. What was it, in him, that disappointed everybody? Why did n't they let him live his own life in his own way, and be satisfied with that?

Why were they always interfering with him—trying to make him do what *they* wished, instead of what *he* knew was best for him? Here was Miss Morris, now. What did *she* know about Margaret that she should turn on him so?

He stepped out angrily, glaring at the pavement ahead of him, and splashing from the curbstones into the running gutters as he crossed the streets. The avenue was deserted, except for an occasional belated cab that dragged by, on its noiseless tires, behind a slow clatter of tired hoofs, the driver muffled to the ears in his rain cape, his fares shut in behind the misted panes of windows that were as dark as those of the closed houses which Don passed. He strode down the shining flagstones, alone with his indignation and driven by it, swinging his clenched hand.

It was the very violence of his pace that brought him relief, at last; for the blood drove through his body with a brisk exhilaration that was irresistible. He threw back his shoulders, to fill his lungs; he put his chin up; his frown began to change from a worried glower to an expression of defiance. . . If they were all against him, why, let them be so! Let it rain! What did he care? The whole world had been against him. Fortune had done its worst. And in spite of it—in spite of everything—he had won Margaret back to join him; his life was working out in the way he had planned; and his happiness was already almost upon him, like the burst of sunshine in which this black downpour would come to an end in the morning.

He swung along with a confident step, spurning the

wet stones underfoot. He felt the water in his shoes and smiled as if it were a part of the universal malevolence which he despised. He summed up his defiance of adversity (and Miss Morris) in an absurb resolve that he would never buy rubbers—never!

PART IV

THE VISIONARY

I

He looked around him at the boarding-house parlor, his hat in his hand—with an appearance of having suddenly dashed in there, at the end of a long run, and stopped dead, in the midst of empty chairs—standing before the yellowed keyboard of an old "grand" piano, and facing the double doors that were closed like a partition at the end of the room. Her letter—Margaret's letter—received on the previous evening, had given him the address; and every thought of every minute, since, had been rushing toward this moment of his arrival breathlessly. The maid who had answered the doorbell had gone upstairs to tell her that he had come. He heard his heart beating in his ears, and the stuffy silence of the room seemed to be listening, with a ghostly attention, to the pulse of his emotion. He turned away, to face the machine-made lace curtains that hung like a faded and simpering coquetry before two over-dressed old windows—old windows that had once been the smiling eyes of a home and still made a pathetic pretence of welcoming the homeless boarder.

He heard the maid coming down the stairs. He waited for the step that should thrill him. "Well?" Margaret said, from the doorway.

She was smiling, with an air of having taken advan-

tage of him, of having studied him while he was unaware of her; and he caught, at once, in that smile, a new expression of friendly criticism, of amused tolerance, that marked some unexpected change in her. She came to him to give him her hand. His voice clung to his throat, in a lump. "Why did n't you come last night?"

"I—I had to work," he said.

She withdrew her hand, still smiling. "Oh, I forgot that you were a working man now!"

Her somewhat formal affectation of parlor gaiety had the effect, on him, of an insincerity; he could not find a reply.

She reached a cushion that stood uncompromisingly in the angle of a sofa arm, shook it and sat down against it. "Won't you take a chair?"

The nearest was a little spindle-shanked pretence of elegance that had been gilded with a brush. "I 'm afraid that will break with you," she warned him. He had to cross the room to a bow-legged parlor chair that was all curves and discomfort; and the distance that lay between them, then, was chilling.

"We arrived Wednesday," she said, as if he had asked her for that information. "Mother left at six o'clock last night. So, you see, I did n't waste any time, did I?"

He shook his head, unable to get his eyes past the worn seam of the carpet that divided them. She had changed. She was older, more self-possessed, with an air of having come back from travel to see him from a new point of view. Even her clothes were strange; for, in his expectation, he had thought of her as dressed in

the summer gown and be-ribboned hat in which he had last seen her; and she wore heavy English walking shoes, a plain black skirt, a cloth waist with bands of ruching at her wrists and collar— He dropped his eyes quickly when, from that collar, he reached her smile again.

"Tell me about yourself," she said. . . "How is Conroy?"

"He 's . . . well."

"Are you together still?"

"Yes. We live together."

"What is *he* doing?"

"Nothing, I think. His father sends him money."

"But *you 're* at work?"

"Yes," he answered dumbly.

"Well . . . Now," she said, with a determined brightness, "have you made a plan for me?"

He shook his head. "I—"

"Oh, but you must have," she cried, in another voice. "I 've depended on you. I left everything until I should see you."

"Did n't you . . . think of anything yourself?"

"How could I? I did n't know of anything to think of. I thought you—"

He found her staring at him in an angry dismay. He gulped miserably. "I have n't found anything for myself—except suping—and trying to write plays."

"What is 'suping'?"

"In the theater—like the chorus—only you don't have to sing."

"And that 's all you 've thought of!" she cried.

He did not reply.

She rose, stiffly. She said: "Then I suppose I 'll have

to find something myself. *Thank* you. I 'm glad—"

"Wait." He sprang up, dropping his hat. "Don't go. I 'll— I 'll think of something. I could n't think of anything but seeing you. I forgot. I did n't have time. There 's something. I 'll find something. I know a girl here—Miss Morris. She 'll know. She 's from Coulton. I asked her. She— I only suggested the stage because I thought, with your singing and that, you 'd be able to— I did n't know of anything else. I thought when we met we 'd be able to talk it over. I thought you 'd know, yourself."

"Well! Why did n't you say so!"

"I—" He looked around the room, as if vaguely accusing it of being the cause of his discomfiture. "I thought you would come out—where we could talk."

She left him, to go upstairs for her hat; and he stood gazing at the empty doorway as if he saw there, still, the expression of her face when she had turned from him, as if he saw in that expression the visible failure of this meeting of which he had hoped so much. With a look of panic, he turned to pick up his hat, and crushing it down on his head he began to walk up and down the room, biting his lip, his whole face working in a desperate effort to think of something to do, something to say, by which to regain the ground that he had lost.

When she came downstairs again, she found him pale, but tremblingly cool. He said, at once, as soon as he had opened the door for her: "Your letter took me so by surprise—I was looking forward so to seeing you—that I did n't think how anxious you would be to find something at once. How long have you? When will your mother be back?"

She replied, still somewhat resentfully: "In a week, at most."

"That will give us plenty of time. There 's your singing, now; you should be able to do something with *that.*" (He had remembered Pittsey's criticism of Miss Morris: "She ought to be singing in a church choir.") "You could get something in some of the churches—or in some of the big concerts—in the choruses at least. And you could get singing pupils—or piano pupils—more easily here than at home, I should think. I 'll ask Miss Morris about it. She should know."

"Yes, but I *can't* sing. I found that out in Germany. And my playing is—is elementary. None of the big men would even teach me, over there. They said 'Come back in three years and we 'll see'!"

"Well, even so." He was determinedly undiscouraged. "This is n't Germany. You could go on studying at the same time." He talked, with his eyes fixed before him, conscious that he was trying to deceive her, as well as himself; but he felt that he was compelled to play the part—compelled by her expectation of aid from him—and he felt, too, that all this matter of earning a livelihood was a thing of no importance so he had her with him.

She asked him what *he* had been doing, and he told her. He accepted meekly her criticism of his failure to get anything but his ridiculous stage work. "I have my mornings free to look for something better," he explained, "and I 'm using my experience at the 'Classic' to do some play-writing."

"You should n't have left college," she said, in the manner of a challenge.

"No," he admitted, humbly. "However, it can't be helped now." He had no thought of reproaching her for her part in that fiasco.

She asked, in a gentler voice: "Where shall we go?"

"Up the Avenue?" he suggested.

"Very well."

If, an hour earlier, he could have foreseen the perfunctory conversation of that walk, it would have depressed him like a disillusionment; but in the agonized moments of his panic in the boarding-house parlor, he had consented to the mutilation of his hope, he had himself used the knife on it, and he had met her, at the doorway again, aware that she—like Miss Morris, like his father, like all the other agents of opposing circumstance—was an enemy of his philosophy of life; that he must love her without the thought of any reward from her. And he saw this without any sentimental self-pity, without any false heroics, as a thing to be reckoned with in his attempts to realize the future which he had planned.

It gave his manner a tinge of melancholy, as if he were years older than she; and he listened and replied to her, without looking at her, his eyes on the humid-blue vista of the avenue that was so stone-bare in the autumn mist.

She detailed, at great length, the story of her quarrel with her mother; and he gathered from it that Mrs. Richardson, being frivolous and fond of travel, was tired of dragging her daughter about with her, wished her to get married and begrudged her the money spent on her tuition. It was Margaret's opinion that her

study of music was to be the serious pursuit of her life; her mother considered a musical education merely an aid to matrimony, an alluring Springtime accomplishment for young ladies who had not yet mated and built their nests. These opinions had clashed when Margaret had rejected the man who wore such detestable shoes. They were still at war. The financial crisis had made the struggle more desperate. Mrs. Richardson evidently looked for an immediate marriage to relieve her of the expense of a daughter. Margaret planned to make herself self-supporting so that she might be free to follow her ambitions. Don was to help her. He promised that he would.

He came to his evening's meeting with Miss Morris, resolved to appeal again to her for aid; but since their parting in the rain at Mrs. Kahrle's steps, she had had an unfrank manner that made confidences impossible. She had not met his eyes squarely when he confronted her with his usual friendliness. Her smile, in their stage promenades, had been merely formal. Several times, seated at the rustic table with her, he had looked up to find her watching him with a thoughtful intensity that startled him. She maintained an oblique reserve, a sort of sidelong watchful silence which let him know that she was thinking of him, and made him feel that she was disappointed in him, but left it impossible for him to defend himself.

Now, when he tried to make her meet him frankly with her blame—by telling her that Margaret had arrived and confessing the girl's unhappy circum-

stances—she listened without a word. And when he asked her for help, for advice at least, she replied: "I can't help her. I could n't help myself."

"Will you let me bring her to call on you? If you were to meet her—"

She shook her head. "What is the use? I can do nothing for her. She will be better in Canada."

"You are very unjust to her," he said, hurt.

She did not reply. He nursed his resentment until, in a later scene, he caught her regarding him with a tragic dumb gaze that overcame him, like a memory of his mother's grief, with a strickening remorse; and when they met again, he said: "You asked me, once, not to judge you—and you 're doing that now, when you should n't, when you don't understand. You don't know how it hurts me."

She brought her hand up, as if to brush back a straying hair from her forehead, shutting her eyes for the instant that her hand covered them. "No," she said. "It 's you."

"How is it?" he argued. "What have I done? I 'm what I always have been. . . I can't change. I can't be untrue—to myself. I 'm—I 'm not very happy, but I should despise myself if I did *that*."

He did not look at her in the long silence that followed. As she left him, she said: "I 'm not accusing you. Only . . . I can't help you to do what you wish. Don't ask me—please."

When he had left Margaret, after that first meeting, he had been numb with a cold depression of spirits. He

had been not merely discouraged; he had been too downcast to feel discouragement. And his revival had been due to one of those unreasonable operations of his temperament which he could not justify, which he could not explain, which were as much a mystery to him as they were to Miss Morris and to everyone else. It was as if his affection for Margaret were stronger when he was alone than when he was with her; as if his imagination made her a dearer figure in his absent thought than she was in her own person. And in the days that followed, no matter how worried and unhappy he was while he was with her, as soon as he had left her he was tormented by the same restless longings, the same ardors that had kept him true to his dreams of her in all the time they had been separated.

On the morning after his unsuccessful appeal to Miss Morris for aid, he awoke as eager to see the girl as ever. He brushed his shabby clothes microscopically; he polished his shoes with elaborate care; he gulped his breakfast; and it was not until he was on the street that he remembered he had no encouraging news to take to her and no new plan to suggest. He turned aside from the direct route to her door, and wandered about the pavements trying to think of some excuse for such an early call.

He loitered at the art-shop windows, seeing her as beautiful as a plaster "Clytie," as regal as "Queen Louise" descending palace steps, as tender as the drooping maiden of a "Lovers' Quarrel." He stood before the display of photographs at a theater door, gazing at a vision of her as a prima donna in grand

opera—in an opera of which he had written the libretto —with her photograph on a gilded easel, in the foyer, opposite his own. In a bookshop, he saw her buying a set of his collected plays. All the windows that he passed were filled with presents which the future held for her. A hansom cab was drawn up before a florist's door while he was ordering—

He frowned in an attempt to concentrate his mind on some practical solution of her present difficulties; and he even bought a morning newspaper to read the "want" advertisements again. But there was no situation vacant that she could fill; and he could think of nothing except the possibility that she had thought of something herself. He went apologetically to consult her, with the paper in his pocket as an excuse.

The maid who came to the door told him that "Miss Richards" had just gone out.

He hurried back toward Broadway in the hope of overtaking her. He thought he saw her in the distance but a nearer view showed that it was not she. He began to wander about from street to street in the idle hope of coming on her suddenly, his whole mind occupied by that absurd chance, in the insane longing of love that is a torture of impossible expectation, of a wish so strong that it seems a surety.

He spent the morning chasing this will-o'-the-wisp, alternating between a mood of pity—in which he saw her going from office to office in search of employment, alone and discouraged—and a glorious foresight of a future in which she should be as fortunate as he. Now the streets were crowded with the rich in spirit, who

passed him by as a street beggar asking, for her, only the alms of a little happiness. And now, the houses and the people and all the activities of the world were the background and the unregarded chorus for a life that was to hold, with her, the glaring center of the stage.

It was a brisk, chill morning. He wore a Spring overcoat of which the collar was so soiled that he had turned it up to conceal its condition from anyone who might walk behind him. He had lost one of his gloves, and for that reason he carried his left hand in the pocket of his coat. His face was lean; his eyes had a wistful emptiness; his hair, untrimmed, came down in a ragged fringe on the upturned collar of his coat.

II

She had been to the studio of a Mr. Barber, a teacher of singing whom she had known in Canada; and when Don called on her, in the afternoon, she had the worried look of discouragement which he understood so well. She had been told that there was nothing for her in her singing or her music—nothing. The church choirs were out of the question, for they paid no salaries worth speaking of, except to the soloists, and she had not voice enough for solo parts. The grand opera chorus—and all other such—had been filled up since the "trying out" in August. There was no possibility of getting piano pupils unless she could find a position

as music teacher in some girl's school; and even for *that*, she would need influence, "pull." In short, she must recognize that in New York the competition was so keen, musicians were so numerous and the average of ability was so high, that it was impossible for her to support herself as so many young women supported themselves in smaller cities. It would be easier for her among friends and relatives, in the circle of family acquaintances. "In fact," she said, "he told me to go home!"

"That 's all right," Don replied doggedly. "That 's what they always tell you."

"But what am I to do?"

"Stay here. Something will turn up. It 's bound to."

She cried impatiently: "But something has to 'turn up' or I *can't* stay!"

"I know. That 's the fix I was in. That 's why I took what I 'm doing now. So did Miss Morris. She had her singing and her music, like you."

"On the stage, you mean? You *know* Mother would n't let me!"

"Well," he said, wearily, "I don't see what your mother has to do with it—if she won't help you. It was the same way with my father. He tried to stop *me*."

She stared, fascinated, at this daring suggestion of revolt.

In the pause of silence he found himself tired of the whole discussion. The morning's walk had fatigued his body, and the strain of the morning's expectation

had fatigued his mind. He felt the difference between those morning fancies and this talk of the merely sordid problems of life. He said: "Well, when shall I see you again?"

"You 're not going?" she cried, as he stood up.

"I ought—to go back. I have things to do."

"Oh please don't leave me like this! What am I to do? You have n't told me what to do!"

"I wish I knew. I don't seem to be able—"

"But you *must*," she insisted, giving way to her panic. "What am I to do? I must get something. I can't go— You don't want me to go home, do you?"

He shook his head, looking dully at the carpet. "I don't seem to be able—"

"You had plans enough once," she cried. "The day you got me into trouble with Mrs. Kimball—"

The memory of that afternoon under the pine returned to him with bitterness. "Yes," he said. "But it was different then."

"How was it different?"

"You were different."

"Thank you!" There were indignant tears in her eyes. "I might have expected— You— Oh!" She turned with a gesture that recalled to him their parting at the gate—on the day she had told him of her quarrel with Mrs. Kimball—and she was out of the room before he could speak. He followed her to the hall in time to see her reach the landing of the floor above. He put on his hat and went out to the street.

There he found a loneliness of soul so calm and so self-centered that the whole city seemed to hush to let

him pass. It was not that she had quarrelled with him, for in the mood that had overtaken him he was indifferent to her anger; and it was not that he did not love her as passionately as ever, though there was a despair of love in his thought. It was merely that he had found her separated from him by that space of mental isolation which seems to divide every one person from every other, the cold interplanetary space which surrounds what we call souls and separates them as eternally as the worlds of the solar system. He had found her a centered identity following an orbit of thoughts and interests within which she saw him revolving, drawn by a superior attraction. Love might bring them a little nearer together; he felt, now, that it could never really merge them in an absolute unity of interest and outlook. And this old tragedy of affection had come on him with a deadening chill of banishment and desertion.

He told himself that he must find her something to do. He assured himself that he would do so. But he knew that whether he succeeded in that endeavor or failed in it, whether she remained in New York or went away, whether he won her or lost her for life, she would be, always, as she was now, a fellow-human looking out at him from the closed chamber of her identity as he looked out at her. He was alone in the world—alone even with her. He might help her and love her, as he might love and help anybody; but he could not share with her his imprisonment in being. The walls were up between them. They spoke through grated windows—which Death, at last, would close.

WITH this mood of pessimism still heavy on him, he returned to the apartment, feeling himself strangely alien in those familiar surroundings. He threw his overcoat and his hat on the cot in the dining-room, reminding himself, as if with an effort, that it was the cot which he had brought out for Walter Pittsey and had never taken back to the room in which the other two boys slept; and it seemed that the incidents of that night had occurred a long time ago. Conroy was sitting with his head and arms on the table, apparently dozing. Bert Pittsey was busy in the little kitchen, from which there came an odor of scorched fat.

"Hello, you noble Thespian," he greeted Don. "Give us an impersonation of a man setting a table, will you? My hands are full."

"What 's the matter with *him*?"

Pittsey laughed. "He 's tired. He has had a hard day."

"What do you mean?"

"His money came this morning."

Don's isolation had raised him above fellow-sympathy, like a judge. He walked deliberately around the table, and putting a hand on Conroy's head he rolled it over on the arm to look at the boy's face. It was the flushed and bloated face of semi-drunkenness. "Ach!" he said, with a shudder of disgust.

Conroy roused himself, blinking. "What 's the—"

"Get up out of that!"

He glared, his eyes inflamed and still befogged with sleep. "What 's chewing *you*?"

Don turned his back, without replying, and went to

the pantry for the dishes. "We want to set the table," Pittsey explained pacifically. "Your dinner 's ready."

Conroy mumbled that he did not need any dinner, and went grumbling to the bedroom. Don, as he laid the table, heard him splashing water in the wash-basin. They sat down to their meal without him; and Pittsey was carving the burned steak, in the gloom of Don's silence, when Conroy came out of the bedroom and confronted his cousin across the table.

"The next time you put your hands on me," he threatened, "you 'll get into trouble."

Don did not look at him. "Go away," he said. "I don't want to talk to you."

"No! Don't you? Oh? Well, I want to talk to you!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What would Aunt Jane say if she—or Uncle John—"

"You mind your—"

"Making a drunken brute of yourself. You 're a disgrace. It makes me sick to see you." The blood went to his head, in a blinding passion. "You ought to be locked up somewhere! Drinking! You have n't done a thing but drink since you came back here—getting worse every day—brutalizing yourself. Where—where do you think this is going to end? In the gutter! On the streets! The town drunkard! In jail! You 're growing worse every day—worse! You 're—"

"Here!" Pittsey thrust a plate into Don's hands. "What 's the use of starting a row. Sit down and eat your dinner. Have some sense about you."

Conroy took a long breath, his anger checked by

Don's unexpected attack on him. "What do you think of that?" he appealed to Pittsey. "Is n't that—Is n't it? G—! If you 'd heard your father talking about *you,* going home on the train! You!" He pointed, his hand shaking. "The supe! Gee! If your father—"

Pittsey took him by the arm. "For Heaven's sake, cut it out. Sit down and eat your dinner."

"I 'm not saying anything," he protested, as Pittsey forced him into his chair. "It 's *that* suping sneak. Shut *him* up."

"Go on and eat your dinners, both of you—before it turns cold. Here! Get busy with this."

But peace was not to be so easily restored. Conroy alternately worried his steak and attacked his cousin, who ate in a silence of evident contempt and disgust. Pittsey spread a newspaper beside his plate and read it, satisfied that the quarrel would subside now that Don was quiet. Conroy continued intermittently to point the moral that if *he* had disappointed *his* father, Don had done as much and more. "You ought to hear what they say about *you* at home! With your mother sick in bed from worrying about you, and your father ashamed to hear you mentioned! You 're a great one to talk, *you* are! . . . Suping, on the stage with a lot of chorus girls. I have n't fallen as low as that, any way. . . If you had left me alone before, there 'd have been no trouble. Sneaking home letters about me. I told them what you were—borrowing money, and playing the cad to get rid of me."

"Oh drop it," Pittsey said, turning his paper.

"I won't drop it! *He* started it. The snivelling codfish."

He went on, in the same strain, endlessly. Don did not speak until he had finished his meal. Then as he rose to get his pipe, he said: "I want you to understand that I 'm not going to be a party to any more of this. If you intend to live like a beast, your father shall know of it. I 'll not help conceal it any longer. . . . And what 's more," he broke out, "I won't live with it myself. I 'd as soon live in a bar room. I can't and I won't! You 'll behave yourself or I 'll write to Uncle John and get out of here altogether."

"Well, say," Conroy sneered, "we 'll miss you, won't we? You can get out of here just as quick as you please. If *you* don't, *I* will!"

Don waved his hand excitedly. "That 's all right. I 'll go. You may roll in the gutter if you like it. You 'll not splash me with your mud any more."

Pittsey rose to check him. Don reached his hat and coat. "That 's enough now, Bert," he said. "I—I 'll move out my things to-morrow morning. I 've had enough. It 's been impossible for me to live here, ever since he came back. I can't live this way, and I won't."

He went out to the street again, like a poet to solitude. Everyone misjudged him, quarrelled with him, or was disappointed in him. He admitted that the cause, no doubt, was in himself; but he could not change himself. He could not, for example, continue to be a silent spectator of Conroy's downfall and make a joke of it, as Pittsey could. He would write his uncle so, and be done with the whole worry. He would take a

room where he might live alone, as he had lived at college. He saw himself in a garret that was lamp-lit and peaceful, with the frost on the windows and nothing but the sloping roof between him and the stars. He would have his plays to work on—his books to read—Margaret to think of. He would have her, there, as she had been before this change in her. She could not rob him of that past, of the memory of her and the old ideal; he could live with that, as he had been living. It was enough. It was the better part. He was alone in the world; they were all strangers to him; he would escape them and be happy.

He did not call on Margaret in the morning. He wrote his letter to his uncle, and went out to look for a room. And he found one in an old red-brick house that had been built in the days when this part of the city was Greenwich village.

The landlady, who was the wife of a police sergeant, lived on the first floor and rented the rest of her house. The back room on the top story had the sloping roof and the dormer window for which Don had been longing; it had also a little iron bed with a mattress that was still dented from the weight of its former occupants, and a "Franklin" grate-stove that had warmed a long procession of young art students, writers and poor Bohemians through the first bitter winters of their struggles in New York. "There never was a finer stove to broil a chop into," the woman said, "er a slice o' toast. An' yuh can get a good meal any time aroun' the corner to the rest'runt."

She asked four dollars a week rent, but when she

found that Don could not take the room at such a price, she let him have it for $2.50, on condition that he supply his own towels and bedding.

"I 'm givin' it to yuh fer less than I w'u'd to any other livin' soul alive," she said. And Don thanked her with all the gratitude of innocence.

In an "express" wagon drawn by a broken-kneed white horse, he moved his trunk, his share of the bedding, a kitchen chair and some cooking utensils. He settled his accounts with Pinsey, who said nothing either in blame or regret. Then he went in peace to eat his luncheon in the "restaurant" which Mrs. McGahn had recommended.

It was that little French resort of unsuccessful Bohemians which used to be known in New York by the significant name, "The Café of Failures," because of its clientele.

III

Fortified by a bowl of watery soup and a tasteless fricassee of chicken, he started out to call on Margaret, more hopeful of the success of his relations with her since he had solved his other problems of intercourse by the simple process of elimination, and as he walked, he formulated a series of apologies and explanations, in which he would plead that he could better help her now that he could give his whole time to her, and she—instead of rebuking and scorning him—would discuss her situation in a friendly confidence that would be

wholly encouraging. Her smile—that had lost none of its dimples—would lose its suggestion of superiority; instead of looking at him with the open gaze which promised nothing because it concealed nothing, she would return to the girlish shy glance that was so dear to his memory. She would recognize his greater experience of life and defer to him. She would accept his more cheerful outlook on the future and be willing to continue her search for employment without this rasping anxiety which made such a discord of their friendship.

He found himself, unexpectedly, at her door. The smiling maid let him in, amused by the frequency of his visits. He waited in the familiar parlor, awakened to apprehension by the approach of a meeting for which he suddenly found himself quite unprepared.

When Margaret appeared, silently, in the doorway, he rose, startled; for she had the pale and set face of an actress entering upon the stage again after the climax of a tragedy. She looked at him, looked away from him, and crossed in front of him to give him her back from the window.

The silence that ensued seemed to him an hour long.

He began bravely: "I wanted to explain. I had been worried—worried about Conroy—and about other things. I had n't had time, scarcely, to think—to plan for you; and—"

"You need n't trouble yourself," she put in. "I 'm going home."

He took a step toward her and stopped, helplessly. There was an anguish of disappointment in his "Why?"

"Mother has written me." She did not turn around. "She has n't even enough money to come for me. She could only send me—" He quivered at the choke in her voice— "my railroad ticket. She can get me a place in the Saint Katherine's School for Girls, teaching music." She added, bitterly: "And deportment!"

"Don't go."

"What else can I do?" she cried, facing him with the accusation of her tears. "I can't stay here. You —No one—"

"I will," he pleaded. "Don't go. Give me a chance. Come and see Kidder with me. Take anything—until we find out. This sort of thing can't be done in a day. Take it until we can get something better."

"Take what?"

"The 'extra' work—like Miss Morris. It 'll only be five or six dollars a week, but it 'll help pay expenses until— I have lots of money. Don't go. I— It 'll be the end of everything." Her silence emboldened him. "I 've been waiting here for you. I knew you 'd come, to study, to go on the stage—the concert stage. And I 've been waiting. That 's why I thought this theatrical work—would be good—to be near you. . . And now, if you give it all up and go away, there won't be anything for either of us. There 's nothing for you, up there, teaching music in a girls' school." He ended, faintly: "And there 's nothing here for *me,* if you go."

She replied, with some of her old spirit: "You did n't seem to care whether I went or not!"

"I know. It has n't been— Everyone has been

against me, worrying me. Conroy was drinking and quarrelling with me. I was worried about them at home. Mother 's ill and they blame me for it—my father does. I did n't care, as long as I knew you were coming. I would n't give up—"

"Well," she said, putting all that aside, "what do you think I can do?"

"You can do what Miss Morris has been doing. There 's nothing to be ashamed of in this extra work. Perhaps Kidder can get you in 'The Rajah's Ruby' with me. You can go on studying your music and your singing."

"But five or six dollars would n't pay my board."

"That 's only the beginning. I 'm getting ten a week already. You can work up into some of the smaller parts. Besides, you don't have to board. We—Conroy and Pittsey and I—have been living for about five dollars a week each, and I believe I can do it for less, where I am now."

She said, out of her thoughts: "It 's horrible to be poor!"

"It 's not as horrible here as it would be at home."

"No." She sat down, sighing with the inward tension of anxiety. "I 'd do anything rather than that. . . . It would be Miss Cary's place. She used to be music teacher at Saint Kitt's, and took us out for our walks, like a governess. . . Who 's Mr. Kidder?"

"He 's the agent—the man who engages the extras. We had better go right away. There may be something waiting now."

She rose, half reluctantly, lingering at the window. "I don't know what Mother *will* say!" She ended her hesitation with "And I don't care!" She turned to him, rigid. "I 'll have to take the responsibility of my own life some day. I might as well begin now."

He saw the fear against which she was fighting. "Don't be afraid," he said, pityingly. "I 'll help."

"Yes." She glanced back at the window that gave a glimpse of the street, a glimpse of that city of strangers in which their struggle would be so unbefriended, their poverty so forlorn. "It—It frightens one a little, does n't it?"

He answered, in the same voice, with a faltering smile: "It 's worse when you wake up at night."

They looked at each other, standing in a silence that gave ear to the muffled tumult of the street traffic, rumbling like the menace of a surf. She sighed again. "Well," she said. "I 'll put on my things."

She left him. He drew himself up slowly and stood waiting, his eyes alight, his whole face alight, with an emotion of defiant hope and tenderness. Here was the battle; and he was ready for it. It was the world against him, for the prize of all his dreams. He settled his coat collar and drew a long breath.

When he heard her coming down the stairs, he stepped out into the hall and met her confidently. "If he 's not there this afternoon," he said, "we 'll be sure to find him in the morning."

BUT he was there—smoking an after-dinner cigar, with

his hat side-tilted on his head, seated before his office desk waiting for his stenographer to return from luncheon. He received them with a genial nod, without rising—until Don introduced her formally; then he took off his hat and held out his huge hand to her rather amusedly. "Sit down. Sit down," he said. "What can I do for you, eh?"

Don brought her an office chair and stood beside her protectingly while he explained what Kidder could do for them; and Kidder listened with the grave air of an elder in a child's game. "Well," he said, "let 's see now. Let 's see where we 're at." He took up some sheets of tabulated reports from his desk, and went through them solemnly. "Never been on the stage before, eh?"

"No," Don answered for her. "We 're— Is it— We 'd like to be together in 'The Rajah's Ruby,' if we could."

"Uh-huh?" He took up a pen. "About five-foot-eight or nine? . . . Let 's see, now."

His pen travelled down a column of names one by one. He paused, reflected, and made a deciding check-mark. "That 'll be all right. Report to Mrs. Connors, Monday, at the Classic." He looked up at the entrance of his stenographer. "Here," he said to her. "Transfer Miss Delancey to rehearsals for 'The White Feather.' Miss Richardson here—" He pointed over his shoulder with his pen handle—"takes her place with the 'Ruby.' Same height."

"Well?" He returned to Don. "Keepin' warm these days? The 'Ruby' looks like an all season run,

don't it?" His desk telephone interrupted him. "Yes. . . Yes. . . Right away. . . Oh, ten minutes. . . Sure." He took up his hat and his cigar together. "Take Miss Richardson's signature. That 'll be all right," he put aside Don's thanks. "I 'll be back in an hour," he said over his shoulder to his stenographer—and left them to her.

She chewed a nonchalant cud of gum while Margaret signed her name on the line that was vacant for it. And still chewing, she had returned to her typewriting, indifferent to them, before they were aware that their business with her was finished. .

"That was easy," Don said, in the elevator.

Margaret had her thoughts. She replied only: "I don't think he 's a gentleman, do you?"

"Well, he 's been mighty kind to me. I don't know what I should have done without him—and Walter Pittsey. They have all—Everyone has been kind to me."

She looked at him with an expression which he mistook for incredulity. He tried to reply to it by telling her of his first discouraging days in New York and of the aid that had come to end them; and this recital was a revelation of character that was not lost on her, any more than Kidder's manner of receiving him had been.

She said, with an unexpected smile: "You have n't changed a bit."

"Did you want me to?"

She looked back at his interview with Kidder. "No. Not if it makes people be nice to you."

"Well, all right then," he said gaily. "I 'm satisfied if you are!"

He was full of hope, voluble of encouragement, gallant with a protective deference that was as winning as flattery. He walked the noisy streets in a devoted attention to her that seemed to leave him oblivious to everything else. Even when he spoke of himself, it was only to give her his experience as an aid to her in making her plans. And all this single-hearted and unconscious devotion came appealingly to her in her mood of loneliness and fear for herself.

They wandered about until she was tired, and then he took her to the galleries of the Fifth Avenue art dealers, where she could sit on plush-upholstered seats and talk of Europe and the Louvre. He confessed that he had always liked landscapes with roads in them—roads up which you might imagine yourself walking to a house that just showed its roof over a hill—or pictures of men and women who were saying something which you could guess.

"But don't you like the color? the poetry?"

He studied the row of landscapes before him. "Yes, I think I do. But I like them best when there 's something to invite you to get inside them and explore, don't you know?"

"Oh, you 're a Philistine," she teased him.

"Am I? . . . Oh well, never mind; you 're not, any way," he said; and he said it with such an innocent pride in her that she could not laugh at him.

When it was time for her to return to her boarding-house for dinner, she faced the prospect of loneliness with a reluctance which he was quick to see; and they went together to a little Sixth Avenue restaurant where

they ate fried oysters and potatoes with a daring sense of freedom from conventionality and the restraint of parents.

"This is better than Coulton," he said, smiling across the small table.

"Or teaching deportment in Saint Kitt's!" She exaggerated a shudder. "Ugh! What a life!"

The oysters were greasily cooked; the restaurant smelled of a rancid kitchen; the table cloth was as soiled as the waiter's linen; but if they were sensible of these drawbacks, the fact was not apparent. He was too happy to see anything but her; and she, obviously, enjoyed his happiness. He kept his eyes on her like a courtier, finding her face even sweeter than when it had been more girlish, and dwelling in the unabashed friendliness of her smile without wishing it more demure. He enjoyed the almost domestic pleasure of sharing food with her; and when he recalled his old vision of her pouring coffee at the breakfast table, he blushed with a feeling of guilt in that anticipation, for it seemed a treachery to her new camaraderie.

To any spectator of their dinner, she would have appeared a merely pretty young woman, of a slight and Puritanic figure—with a suggestion of provinciality in her simple ruchings and her low heels—dining poorly, in a smelly restaurant, with a thin, a shabby, an amusingly adoring young man who might be an ill-paid clerk and who was certainly a stupid conversationalist. The romance of the situation was all in their own minds; as romance has a way of being. But he felt that he had won in his first bout with the world that was trying to separate her from him, and this din-

ner was to remain in his history of himself as wonderful as a royal fête, as one of the gala occasions of his life, as an incident for poets, like a wedding day.

IV

He came to the evening's performance of "The Rajah's Ruby" full of blissful and quiet thoughts; and he replied to Miss Morris's silent scrutiny with the bare announcement that Miss Richardson was to join the company on Monday night. He was unmoved by her stubborn insistence that he was "making a mistake." He asked, cheerfully: "How? Why am I?"

She answered by asking whether he had done any writing on his play; and he had to explain that his quarrel with Conroy had upset him, but that now—in his own room, alone with his manuscript—he would be able to give all his time to his ambitions. The explanation did not seem to satisfy her, though she did not voice any criticism of it. She asked: "Does her mother know what she 's doing?"

"No," he said. "She 's not doing it as a permanent thing. She 's only coming here until she finds an opening for her music."

"You know, as well as I do, that she 'll never find an opening for her music in New York."

He replied calmly: "I know that she can do this extra work until she has time to find something better. That 's all she expects."

Miss Morris said nothing more, and he left her to

accept the situation as best she could. But at the matinee of the following day—which was Saturday—he made another appeal to her to be kind to Miss Richardson. "She has n't a friend in town but me—and you, if you 'll *be* her friend. You know how it is to come to strange work like this, without any one to tell you anything. A word or two from you would mean so much to her. . . She can't go back home—any more than you or I. She has n't a penny but what she 'll earn. They 've lost everything. . . I 'm sure you 'll like her. She—"

"If I do anything for her," she broke out, "it 'll not be for her sake. But I think you 're making a mistake. You 're doing wrong. You should have sent her home where she belongs. She 's out of her place here, and neither you nor anyone else can make her succeed in it."

"That may be true," he said diplomatically, "but it can't hurt her to try—and it can't hurt us to give her what little help we can. Can it?"

She answered "No," but with an evident reservation; and what the reservation was, he was to understand after a conversation which they had in the lawn-party scene, that evening.

She said: "I 've had an offer of a good part in a new play by Mr. Polk. And I 'm goint to take it. I want you to wait until you hear from me."

" 'Wait'? I don't under—"

"I have some influence with him." She did not look at him. "He is taking a theatre of his own, to produce his own plays, independently. There may be some-

thing for you. I think I can get something for you—better than this at least."

"Oh say, you 're—you 're awfully kind," he stammered. "You don't know how I appreciate— I—"

"Don't—" She caught herself up. "Don't thank me, I mean—not until you see whether I can do it or not. I want you to—to trust me; that 's all. I want you to believe that I 'll do anything to help you, except what I don't think is wise for you. I mean about *her*. And I want you—if you hear anything—if anyone says anything against me—not to believe it until you ask me."

He was reminded of a sentence in a letter from Walter Pittsey received several days before: "I have heard a weird story, here, about your friend Miss M. and a playwright. How is she?" But his curiosity had not risen to the bait; he had felt himself too indebted to Miss Morris to listen to gossip about her; and he had so replied to Pittsey.

He replied, now, to her: "I would n't believe anything against you, if you told me yourself."

She did not speak. The stage dialogue was rapidly nearing the conclusion of their scene together. He asked her if he might walk with her to her door, after the play. "Thank you," she said. "No." And the strain of emotion on her voice warned him not to make her talk.

They parted in silence, not to meet again that night.

He was sorry that he could not overcome her hostility to Margaret; but since that hostility was insuperable, he was glad that she was leaving the company.

In spite of his gratitude to her, he felt that there was something not quite open and natural about her; the very violence of those emotional outbursts which he had unwittingly provoked in her, in the past, had made him uneasy concerning the unknown depths from which they came. It was as if she were continually striking matches in the darkness with a disconcerting suddenness—as she had on the evening of their first meeting—and as suddenly dropping the match and withdrawing into the darkness again. She had known him for years, and yet in all those years she had kept herself hidden from him. She had never told him anything of her past with Polk; and she had spoken guardedly, now, of her "influence" with the playwright. In short, she had repelled Don by her lack of frankness in all matters concerning herself, though she had attracted him and bound him to her by the sincerity of her kindly interest in his welfare.

Well, she, too, was leaving him now, he thought; and that secession would eliminate another of his problems. His life was becoming more simple; it was narrowing down to his relations with Margaret; it was beginning to flow quietly in a still, deep stream. As he walked home after the play, under a moon that looked down, untroubled, on the fretful street lights, he felt himself walking towards peace, guided by that placid hermit of the night, that mild philosopher of the white silences. Its influence possessed him with an unquestioning contentment. He felt, rather than argued, the presence in the world of an unseen Power for good that had led mankind from barbarity to civilization along a progress of which simple faith had been the

blind compass. He felt at peace with the world, at peace with the heavens, at peace with himself. He felt at peace even with his love—content to give all and expect nothing, satisfied to be near her so that he might help her, willing to wait without a word of encouragement, so certain of his goal that he did not even raise his eyes to see how far it was away.

His little room received him like a home. He kindled a fire of small wooden blocks which he had bought for two cents a bundle, from "Tony," the Italian vendor down the street; and he warmed the dregs of his breakfast's pot of coffee, to drink it sitting on the side of his bed, holding his cup on his knee, smiling, like a camper in the wilderness who looks back, from the rise of a hill, over the difficult and tangled valleys he has crossed.

He went to church with her in the morning—to a house of fashionable worship on Fifth Avenue—unconscious of the fact that he was no longer in revolt against the "police of organized religion"; and he listened, like a child at the theater, to the music and the singing and the literary eloquence of a minister who flattered and smiled on his congregation. But when Margaret asked him what he had thought of the sermon, he had to confess that he had not heard it. "I was thinking of the little church at home," he said. "I 'm glad I went, are n't you?"

"I 'll not go to *that* church again!"

"Why not?"

"They judge you by your clothes. That was some sort of servants' gallery the usher put us in."

He looked down at himself guiltily. "I suppose I *do* need a new pair of shoes."

"Yes, and a new hat, and a new overcoat, and a new suit of clothes, and a new necktie and a pair of gloves."

"I can get the hat, anyway," he said; and he said it with such a disproportionate accent of hopefulness that she had to laugh at him.

"You are certainly an optimist!"

But when he wished her to take her midday meal with him at his French café, she said: "No. I 'd feel as if I were eating your new hat. You call for me again at half-past two." And she escaped into her boarding-house while he was still laughing at her little joke.

He thought that he had never been happier. It was so calm and so assured a happiness, derived from such heart-easing friendliness, such practical and smiling friendliness, and so dear. If it were to continue all his life long, it would be enough.

She was even more practical in the afternoon. On their way to the Park, she made him tell her about his quarrel with Conroy, about his father and his mother, about his play-writing and his future plans. And when he led her to the bench on which Miss Morris and he had sat, beside the water—explaining. "The last time I sat here I did n't think I 'd ever—" she interrupted him to ask: "What *shall* I tell Mother?"

He did not know. He suggested that she tell as little as possible. "Just write that there 's a prospect of doing better with your music here than at home. Something may turn up any day now. And it 's just

possible, you know," he hinted reluctantly, "that your mother may be—that she 'll not object to having you—to letting you make your own plans."

"That she 'll be glad to have me off her hands? I should n't be surprised."

"It would settle all the trouble as far as *she* 's concerned."

"I had n't thought of that."

"Then you could take your own time about finding something better."

"Well," she agreed, accepting this easy method of postponing her worries. "Now tell me what I 'll have to do, meanwhile, in 'The Rajah's Ruby'."

"Miss Morris has left the company," he said. "She played with me. And I 'm going to get the stage manager to put you in her place, if I can. You 'll have really nothing to do." He described what there was to describe in her part. "We 're just to make up the background. It will be all right. Don't worry. You 'll see to-morrow night."

She nodded, sunken back in the arm of the rustic bench, looking down at the muddy lip of the lake where the fallen leaves were black in the water. She was not beautiful in the way that Miss Morris would have been in such a pose; but she was so tenderly fragile, with her small shoulders and the frail lines of her girlish figure—so innocent in the large meditation of her eyes, so appealingly unprotected and so sweet—that Don turned away from the sight of her, trembling with a new sense of the fearful and delicious privilege of being the only barrier between her and adversity.

"I must find a room at once," she said. "I can't pay ten dollars a week board."

He mastered a tone of commonplace to reply: "I think there 's one vacant in the house that I 'm in—on the floor below me. That would be better than going to a strange place. I could look after you a little there. It should n't be more than three dollars. I get mine for two-fifty."

"Heated?"

"No-o. I heat it."

"Then you 're paying too much. I was asking one of the women at the boarding-house."

"Mrs. McGahn said she was giving it to me for less than she would to anyone else."

"The old blarney! And you believed her. I think it 's *I* that had better come and look after *you* a little."

"Do!"

She laughed. "What is Mrs. McGahn like?"

He described the house and its mistress, explained the arrangements he had made for his meals, and estimated the cost of them; and while he talked his eyes were fixed on the rosy promise of having her under his roof, and he smiled and smiled. When she agreed to call on Mrs. McGahn with him that evening, to look at the vacant room, he accepted the future as already a thing accomplished. "Then when you 're all settled," he said, "we can get to work in real earnest and see what we can find for you. It 's always better to wait—not to accept the first thing that offers. Make a choice and take the best."

"To hear you, one would think I 'd been besieged with offers."

"Well, perhaps you will be."

"Yes! *Per*-haps!" She stood up, settling her jacket at the waist with spread hands, arms akimbo; and there was something so intimate in this little feminine attitude of the boudoir, that it came to him as a mark of the unconstraint of friendship at which they had arrived. "It 's time we were having our suppers."

"Sha'n't we have supper together?"

"No. You must economize. Mine is paid for in advance. You may call for me at seven."

MRS. MCGAHN received them in a parlor full of all the old furniture and all the accumulated bric-a-brac of thirty years of housekeeping. She received them with a suspicion which neither of them understood, and she listened to Don, staring, silent, and wrapped majestically in her black shawl. "I don't rent rooms t' any unmarried women," she said, "except I know who they is."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Don apologized. "Mrs. McGahn, this is Miss Richardson."

Margaret shook hands with her in a manner that evidently had some effect. She wavered, looking from one to the other, but she seemed still unsatisfied.

"Miss Richardson is studying music here," Don explained. "She does n't wish to board any longer. I suggested that there was a room empty here which you might let her have."

She asked Margaret: "Where 're yer—yer folks?"

"My mother has gone back to Canada. We have been boarding. I thought this would be cheaper." She smiled, amused.

"Well," Mrs. McGahn defended herself, "I can see yuh 're decent, but I 've got to be careful, an' yer comin' in on me this way— Are y' all alone in N' York?"

"Yes. Mr. Gregg is the only friend I have here. We used to know each other at home."

"How old are yuh?"

"Nearly twenty."

"Yes? Well now! Canadyens! I thought they was all Injuns up there."

"Oh no," the girl laughed. "Not all of us."

"Have yuh been long in N' York?"

"Just a few days."

"Aw?" She turned to Don, twinkling. "Yuh 're engaged, are yuh?"

He said "Yes," and then corrected himself hastily—"Oh no, no!"—blushing scarlet.

She glanced from one to the other with an illumined smile. "Yuh 're a pair o' kids. Come along, girl. I 'll show yuh the room."

Don was so confused by his slip of the tongue that he did not follow them, and they kept him waiting an unconscionably long time for their return; but when they came, Mrs. McGahn was blarneying and mothering the girl in a garrulous kindness, and Margaret had engaged the room. She and Don had to refuse an invitation to sit in the parlor and "chat a while." "Some other night, then," Mrs. McGahn said, following them to the door. "It 's open to yuh any time yuh 'll be wantin' in. He smokes in the kitchen when he 's home at all, an' I 'll not butt in meself. Don't

be backward about usin' it. It won't be the first lolly-gaggin' in there. Yuh need n't be a bit afeard o' that."

After a self-conscious silence that carried them to the street corner, they both, suddenly, laughed—an apologetic laugh that pretended to accept Mrs. McGahn's insinuations as absurd.

V

LIFE in New York had seemed to Don a sort of multitudinous obscurity in which individuals were merely atoms of a homogeneous mass, living, thinking and acting in groups of thousands; and it had seemed to him that death, there, would be worse than death at sea. He had found himself walking the streets in the midst of activities in which he had no part, like a ghost; and he had been as unregarded as if he had been indeed invisible. But now, on this memorable Monday, he was to begin acquiring a new point of view; he was to find that what had been a desert to one person could be an Eden for two; he was to learn that the indifference of the city could be as happy as the indifference of the fields.

He went with a swinging stride, from Mrs. McGahn's doorway up the cold November streets, through an iron rumble of cars and wagons, as much alone with his thoughts as if he were walking on the seashore beside the continual and meaningless rush and thunder of waves.

He went with Margaret to hire a cart for the moving of her trunks, to interview Kidder about getting her Miss Morris's place in the background of the "The Rajah 's Ruby," and to see Mrs. Connors at the "Classic" about the costume for the part; and in the street-cars, as on the sidewalks, they seemed shut in together by the busy unconcern of the city—as they had been once by the storm on their umbrella, long ago—happy in the isolation of their common interests. Even when she forced him into a "gents' furnishing store" and helped him to choose a new hat, the clerk remained studiously indifferent to her coquettish participation in the purchase And they ate luncheon, in a crowded "dairy restaurant," without so much as meeting a curious glance.

"Two checks," she directed the waitress. He attempted to protest that it was his "treat," and that her luncheon should be charged on his check. She said: "I 'll never come with you again unless you let me pay my own way." He was wise enough to leave her that mark of her independence withou any further argument; and she allowed him to escort her back to Mrs. McGahn's, where she wished to spend the afternoon writing letters and arranging her room.

He employed a vacant hour by strolling up the Avenue to call on Pittsey; and he found there a bitter letter from his aunt, upbraiding him for deserting Conroy after having, in the first place, induced the boy to run away to New York. He accepted her injustice with a calloused insensibility. A note from his uncle asked him to keep an eye on the prodigal, at least; and he tried to satisfy the obligation by asking Pittsey how Conroy was getting on.

"Don't know," Pittsey answered laconically. "Don't see much of him. I 'm taking a staff position on the paper, next week, and I 'll see less of him then."

"How will you get the housework done?"

"Oh, he 's found a woman to come in for three hours a day, to straighten up the rooms and cook us our dinner."

"Where did he find her?"

"Search me. I don't know. I have n't seen her yet."

"Well," Don said, "good-bye. I hope you have success on the paper."

"Thanks. I 'll surely have my hands full. So long."

Don returned to his garret, glad that he was free of his old life. He sat smoking, with his feet on the fender of the stove, so occupied with his thoughts of the girl below him that he did not think to light a fire. He lay down on his bed, covered himself with his overcoat, and fell asleep to dream of Coulton. He was wakened in the darkness by her knocking on his door.

"Hurry! Hurry!" she cried. "We 'll be late!"

THEY arrived in time—thanks to the laughing haste they made in the restaurant and on the street—but he found two new supers in the dressing-room, he had to show them how to "make up," and he was kept so busy helping them that he had not time to think of her. He was still powdering the hair on his temples, to give it the grey of approaching middle-age, when the call-boy shouted in the door: "All up!" And he had to run

for the stage, pressing upon his upper lip his false moustache, of which the gum had not yet dried.

It followed that he did not see her until the curtain had risen on the act. He lifted his hat as he approached her in the promenade, but she gave him a frightened glance and tried to pass him without speaking; and when he said "Don't you know me?" confronting her smilingly, she stepped back from him with a start of bewilderment, bumping into the two girls who were behind her. He saved the situation by stepping between her and the audience. "All right," he whispered. "Walk across the way you were going. Did n't you know me?"

When he had brought her safely to the wings, she stammered indignantly: "I—I thought it was another of those— One of those men spoke to me."

"Who? Where?"

"Over on the other side." She pointed him out; and Don recognized him as an unwholesome-looking youth named Cousin, whom the other supers had nicknamed "Delicate Pete."

"What did he say?"

"Something about it being a fine day for a walk."

Don laughed. "Perhaps he thought he knew you."

"Well," she said, with a half-humorous exasperation, "I don't see how he could. I should n't know myself. I feel like a silly, plastered up this way. I can hardly see!" Her lashes were thick with cosmetique. "And you! You 're the color of a wooden Indian—the ones they have in front of cigar stores. I should think you 'd feel *perfectly* absurd."

This was a point of view which he had not expected. He felt himself shrink from the figure of a Pall Mall dandy to something grotesque. "You have to put it on —the paint," he excused himself, his smile fading. "We 'd look ghastly in this light, without it."

She frowned out at the sauntering chorus in the glare of the calcium light. "You look worse than ghastly with it!"

That remark struck him as rudely as a blow. When he spoke again, it was to say, in a brave attempt to stand up to the situation: "I guess . . . it 's our turn . . . to cross."

She hung back. "Do we have to go out there again? Do you think anyone in the audience might recognize me?"

"I 'll walk on that side."

She crossed, stiff with embarrassment, her eyes fixed on the boards. "Oh dear," she said. "What do we have to do in the next scene?"

"Are n't you going to like it?" he asked, in such a disappointed tone that she replied: "I don't suppose it matters whether I like it or not. I 'll do it, anyway."

They went to and fro, several times, in silence, Don crestfallen and gloomy, and she regarding her unfamiliar surroundings with critical distaste. "My gown does n't even fit me," she complained. He did not confess that he thought she was as pretty as a bridesmaid in it. "They all look so shoddy," she said, a moment later. "It is n't a bit like what I thought it would be." And when he tried to turn the conversation by warning

her to be careful with her parasol—that Miss Morris "got into trouble with the stage manager for catching it in things"—she asked abruptly: "Was she like these other girls?"

"Why?"

"Because she was n't very nice, if she *was*. In the dressing room— Well, they are n't very *nice*, the way they talk—some of them."

"I 'm sorry you don't like it," he apologized humbly: "It 's only for a short time, you know—till we find something better. Besides some of them I 've met are not like that. Those that are graduates of the dramatic schools— I 'll introduce you to some of them. I think you 'll find them better."

"Well."

He piloted her through the rush to the jeweler's window when the alarm was given inside the shop; and after the curtain had fallen, he saw her safely on her way down to her dressing-room again.

In the scenes that followed he watched her across the stage, and tried to smile encouragingly when he caught her eye. She seemed to be getting on better; she had evidently struck up an acquaintance with a "Miss Adara Doran," whom Don had found to be—in spite of her name—quite untheatrical and rather pleasant. He began to feel more hopeful. Perhaps, as she became more accustomed to her surroundings, she would be more contented.

While the stage-hands were setting out the last properties for the lawn-party scene, he picked his way through the crowd of waiting supers, in search of her,

eager to join her so that she might have no difficulty in finding the little table at which they were to sit together. As he crossed behind the back-drop, to gain that side of the stage to which she would enter from the women's dressing-rooms, he passed "Delicate Pete" coming in the opposite direction. Don nodded. There was a sort of defiant impudence in the smile Cousin gave him in response, but he thought nothing of it until he turned into the wings and came suddenly on Margaret standing to meet him in an attitude of being still at bay. The deadly paleness of her face flooded with blood at sight of him. She gasped: "He—he—" She blinked dry eyes, staring, outraged. "He said something awful to me."

"The same one? Cousin? That same man?" He scarcely waited for her feeble "Yes." All the accumulated disappointments of the evening rose together in him in a rage. He hurried back after the super, his hands clenched. He saw Cousin standing among his fellows, his back turned. The others parted instinctively, staring at the wrath in Don's eyes. He caught Cousin by the collar, jerked him around, and struck him a blow in the face; the super threw up his arms blindly; and Don struck him three times, with his closed fist, on the mouth, placing the blows in a white heat of anger that made him as clear-sighted and apparently as deliberate as if the whole thing were done in cold blood. Then he threw Cousin off, and stepped back—into the grasp of the stage manager.

"Get out!" He was swung around. "Get out!" He was thrust into the arms of a scene shifter who

rushed him off to the stairs and shoved him down with a force that would have thrown him headlong if he had not saved himself by catching the handrail. The manager followed him with Cousin, who was bleeding at the nose and mouth. "You 're both discharged. Don't either of you come back to that stage. Get your things off now, and get out."

Don hung up his hat and coat. "I 'll have to wait," he said. "I look after the costumes for Mr. Kidder."

The stage manager, with an angry oath by way of dismissal, turned and went back to his work. It was the sight of "Delicate Pete" bleeding into the washbowl that brought Don to a sense of what had happened.

He had been as if poised above his own actions, watching himself, in a sort of double-consciousness that always came on him in such moments of excitement; and every aspect of the swift instants through which he had moved had imprinted itself on his visual memory as clearly as if he had seen it with the cool attention of an unmoved spectator. Now, all those sensations—Cousin's impudent smile, the sight of Margaret drawn up to meet another attack, the shameful suffering of her face—the eyes of the supers as they fell back in front of him, the crackle of Cousin's starched collar in the grasp of his hand, the blind movement of the super's arms guarding his eyes while he choked with open mouth, squirming to avoid the blows that struck brutally on his bleeding lips—the sudden roughness that had seized Don himself from behind and whirled him away dizzily and thrown him at the stairs down

which he stumbled—all these sensations, all these pictures came back on him, together with the emotions which should have accompanied them, like the recollection of a drunken crime which now assailed his sober consciousness with a sickening poignancy, vivid and revolting. He sat down in a nervous collapse. He put his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands; the cold perspiration gathered on his face; he shuddered with the faintness of vertigo.

What would Margaret say? What would Kidder say? Where would he find work? His anger had passed from him like the fumes of liquor and left him sitting with these questions, in the midst of the wreck which he had pulled down on himself.

A sudden, violent blow on the back of his head brought him to his feet in time to see Cousin running from the room in fear of pursuit. He looked at the shoe with which he had been struck, lying where Cousin had dropped it. He put his hand up to the bruise, and rubbed it, dazed.

He was standing so, staring at nothing, when the supers came in at the end of the act and crowded around him with questions. He shook his head, like an idiot. "Tell Miss Richardson to wait for me," he said. "Ask her to wait for me at the door. Tell her it 'll be all right. Tell her to wait. Tell her to wait for me."

His message, and the news that he had been dismissed from the company, came to her—through Miss Doran—in the dressing-room, where she had remained, too hysterical to return to the stage. And when Don had

seen the last of the supers' costumes on the hooks, the room deserted, and the lights out—lingering over his duties as if he thought in that way to postpone the fact of his dismissal—he met her at the stage entrance with such a look of guilt and apology and broken appeal against her blame that it went to her heart like the sight of tears. "Oh *Don,*" she cried, "why, *why* did you bother with me? Why did n't you let me go home? I—I 've only made trouble. I—"

'Wait," he said, hurrying her out to the refuge of the darker street. "Don't. . . It 's nothing. We 're all right."

She took his arm, clinging to him as they walked, neither of them paying any attention to the direction in which they were going, "You should n't have done it. You should have let me go."

"No, no. It is n't that. It 's all right. I 'll find something else with Kidder. I did n't know. I did n't understand how it would all seem to you. Miss Morris —I should have known better than try to—to associate you with those cads. Miss Morris warned me."

"Ah!" she sobbed, "what use am I? What *is* there that I can do if I can't do even *this*? I was ungrateful. I said things to hurt you. I did n't even *try* to help you by being cheerful, by accepting what you got for me."

"Don't," he pleaded. "You—"

She shook his arm, almost angrily. "I *did!* I behaved shamefully. And any other girl, instead of appealing to you, would have slapped his face for him! The pig! What did you do to him?"

"I struck him . . . two or three times . . . in the face."

"And they discharged *you?*"

"He was bleeding. They don't allow fighting on the stage. They discharged us both."

"I don't care!" she cried defiantly. "I 'm glad! It was no place for *you,* either. You 're too good to be among such—such people. I 'm glad it happened. It 'll do them good." She added, in another spirit: "You 'll be able to find something else to do, won't you?"

"Yes! Yes! Of course! Kidder will find me something. And Miss Morris, before she left, told me she would get something better for me in Polk's theater—Peter Polk, the dramatist. She has some influence with him. She has known him a long time. I 'll be all right. It 's not *that.* It 's you."

"Oh *me*! I can go home and teach deportment. I don't seem to have sense enough for anything better."

"We must start out to-morrow morning and find you something, some way—not on the stage, I mean."

"Why do you bother with me? Always—*always*—I 've disappointed you. It was my fault that you left college. Now I 've made trouble for you here."

He caught her hand up against his side, pressing it with the arm on which she had been leaning. " You 're —you 're all that made life worth living."

The voice silenced her, shamed her, oppressed her with her unworthiness and exalted her with the sincerity of his belief in her. It was the voice of a determined loyalty, at once so proud of her and so humble

in its pride, that it might have made a queen worthy of her throne. She looked out, with wet eyes, on the street of theater crowds which had suddenly, at the turn of a corner, confronted them with its hansom cabs and its café lights and its midnight gaiety; and she felt herself uplifted above it, beside him, in the isolation of a companionship so intensely realized that for a bewildering moment he seemed not a separate person but a part of her. Then she drooped her head, like a woman returning from an altar rail where she has received the eucharist; for she had indeed, in that moment, partaken of the sacrament of love, and she felt her emotion glowing through her like a holy spirit. In that moment the great miracle of the young heart had wrought its almost divine change in her. From that moment, she was no longer a soul free in the midst of its fellows; she had surrendered herself to the need of the man beside her, and, through him, to the great fraternity of human suffering and the office of bearing into the still unseeded future the wonder and agony of human life.

He felt the quivering of her hand on his arm. "Are you cold?"

"No," she said gently. "Don't worry—about me."

She accompanied him, thereafter, in a silence which gave him no hint of her thoughts; and supposing that she was silent because she was despondent, he tried to encourage her with his usual assurances that everything would "come out right," that they would begin their campaign "really" in the morning, that he had done wrong

to temporize by accepting a position on the stage for her, that he should have "stood out" for something better. She had not the heart to reply to any of his extravagant misstatements of her case, for she could understand that he was talking to keep up his own courage; but she said, at last: "Yes, yes. It will be all right, of course. Don't worry about it any more to-night. We 'll begin fresh in the morning."

"You 're not thinking of going home?" he asked timidly.

"No," she said. "I 'll stay—with you."

She said it with an accent—as of resignation—that spurred him on to new promises. "You 'll never regret it. *I* never have. It's hard at first, but once you get your start made, you have opportunities—opportunities that you 'd never find at home." There was Miss Morris, for example: she had made friends with "one of the most successful dramatists in America," and he had actually come to her and offered her "a leading part in one of his companies." There was Bert Pittsey, taking a staff position on "one of the best papers in New York." There was Walter Pittsey, at the head of a theatrical agency in Boston, with every prospect of rising to a high place among the managers of the "trust."

Their street—when they turned into it—was empty, the houses dark. The city seemed to be sleeping in an immense contempt of their misfortune, and his voice sounded small and impudent, in the optimism of a pigmy, the boast of an impotence so inconsiderable that silence received it without so much as an echo. She

said, at their door: "You must get a good night's rest, now. Don't worry. Don't think of it any more tonight. Promise me, will you?"

He promised her. They tip-toed upstairs to their rooms, careful not to awaken the household. They exchanged a whispered good-night in the hall. He lit his lamp, locked his door, and sat down on the side of his bed, exhausted, all his bravado gone from him, confronting doggedly the renewal of a struggle in which he had been beaten down to defeat after defeat.

VI

"You should have waited," Kidder said irritably. "You should have waited till you had him outside. This sort of thing hurts me a whole lot with the managers, you understand. They 've been raking me on the 'phone for it this morning, and I don't like it. I can't afford to send up supers that scrap behind the scenes. You ought 've known better."

"I did it without thinking."

"You ought n't to do things without thinking. The stage 's no place for anybody that does things without thinking. And it 's no place for a girl that can't take care of herself without starting a row like that. This sort of thing makes a lot of trouble for me. They jump on me. They take it out of me. I don't like it."

It was evident that he did not like it. It was evident also that he intended to make Don suffer for the criti-

cisms which he himself had borne. "I 'm sorry," Don said, miserably.

"You should n't have done it. I had a lot of confidence in you. I gave you one of the best things I had. I made a place for this Miss What-'s-her-name too. Shoved her in over another girl. And that 's a thing stage managers don't like, either—having their company broken up that way. It leaves me open to a lot of hot roasting—the whole business."

"I 'm sorry. If you 'll give me another chance—"

"I can't give you another chance like that. I have n't got it."

"Have n't you anything?"

Kidder hesitated, swung around in his swivel chair, and began to look over his typewritten lists. Don waited, as shamefacedly as a schoolboy who has been lectured before a whole classroom—for Kidder's nonchalant stenographer had been rustling papers at the other side of the office. The telephone rang, and Kidder left Don's fate in the scales while he busied himself witm more important affairs. When he had hung up the "receiver," he took another glance at his lists, and said, without turning around: "No. I have n't anything. I 'm filled up. I may have an opening next week, in 'Appomattox'—I don't know. It 'll only be fifty cents a night, anyhow. I can get lots of hobos for these war plays. That 's all I 've got."

He returned to the opening of his letters and left Don to take himself out of the office.

Fifty cents a night! That would be, with two matinees, four dollars a week. He was paying two dollars

and fifty cents for his room. The dollar and a half remaining would scarcely pay his car fares!

He did not ring for the elevator. He walked down the four flights of stairs in some sort of confused notion that he could not afford to ride. He faced the street, appalled. It was as busy as Kidder with his mail.

When he remembered Miss Morris, he set out again in frantic haste, almost running, his single glove rolled into a ball in his hand, his hat tilted down over his eyes by the bruise on the back of his head, swallowing dryly. He came, breathless, to the steps of Mrs. Kahrle's boarding-house. The door opened a grudging crack to him. "She ain't here," the woman said, and shut him out.

He found himself, instantaneously, calm. He was like a man in quicksand, who finds that his panic is plunging him deeper, and who stiffens into rigidity, motionless, to wait for the arrival of help. "This is all right," he told himself. "These things happen, of course. We must wait. When I see Kidder again, he 'll not be so bad-tempered. It 's a matter of waiting a few days. I can write to Miss Morris. I can write to Walter Pittsey and get his advice. I have plenty of time. I don't have to see Margaret for two or three hours yet. I must think of something to tell her."

He was as tired as if he had been running a race; and the worry and excitement had given him a dragging ache in the small of his back. He found himself shaking with cold. He buttoned his light overcoat, sank his hands in his pockets, and went down Broadway huddled in on himself against the wind. He

thought of the aid he had once received from his aunt —and he remembered her last letter. He knew that his uncle, appealed to, would advise him to return home. He had no longer the companionship—such as it had been—of Conroy and Bert Pittsey to help him. Miss Morris was, after all, a doubtful ally who might turn against him because of Margaret. He was alone —as he had so desired to be—in the face of a calamity that made him feel the want of friends. He was alone, unable to help himself. And Margaret was depending on him!

An apathy of despair began to mute his thoughts, and he struggled against it, with an instinct of self-preservation, as if it were a suicidal impulse. "See now," he told himself. "At this time yesterday, everything was going as well as possible. She was on the stage with you. You were both lodging in the one house. You were looking forward to a winter with her, to promotions, to gradual increases of salary, to a future that should grow from day to day into the greatest happiness. Well, twenty-four hours can't have changed it all. It 's impossible! Or if one day has made all the difference, another day can restore it. What are you afraid of? Nonsense! You have come through narrower squeaks than this. Look where you were the day you were starting for New York—or the day you met Pittsey on Sixth Avenue. You had n't even four dollars a week, then. And she was in Europe!"

But the situation was not to be talked down. There remained the facts that he had used up all his savings,

that his work for Kidder would not pay his expenses, that he knew of nothing which Margaret could do. He came on the forlorn hope that there might be an important letter of some sort waiting him at his old rooms; and in another rush of panic-stricken activity he hurried towards that improbability as if it had been the most certain aid. He saw the streets cold, unfriendly, crowded, as busy as machinery, and as remorseless. He was always to remember them in that aspect—as an exhausted swimmer, struggling to reach shore, will remember the horrible composure of level water that engulfed his feeble agonies without so much as showing a shudder on its vast blank of cruelty.

Conroy opened the door to him, blocking it with a challenging scowl.

"Are there any letters for me here?"

"No."

"Is Bert in?"

"No."

Don saw a woman's hat and veil on the dining-room table. He looked inquiringly at his cousin; and Conroy shut the door on that look as if he considered it an impertinence.

Don turned towards his lodgings, too weak to drag himself any further. He was conscious only of the physical need of rest. At thought of the shelter of his room, he ached, body and mind, for the closed door and the bed that awaited him.

MARGARET, at midday, knocked to discover whether he had returned; and he put on cheerfulness like a mask

to meet her. "Are you ready for luncheon?" he asked.

"When did you come in? There 's been a man here looking for you. He left word that he 'd be back at two."

"For *me*?"

"Yes, for you. Mrs. McGahn said she thought he said his name was 'Pitty.'"

"Oh." His voice went flat. "It must 've been Bert Pittsey."

"What did Mr. Kidder say?"

"He 'll have a place for me next week, all right. There 's no difficulty about that. We must find something for you, now. We 'll talk it over at luncheon."

"We 'll do no such thing," she said. "I 'm not going to have you worried about me. I have a plan of my own. I 'm going to see someone this afternoon."

"What is it?"

"I 'll not tell you. If you ask me another word about it, I 'll have my lunch alone."

"Then I 'll not tell you about Kidder," he said, with a desperate affectation of gaiety.

He felt like a man who has just learned that he is incurably ill of a fatal disease, and who returns home to deceive his family so that they may be spared at least a few weeks of useless grief. He knew that such luncheons as this were numbered; and with the recklessness of the condemned he coaxed her to have a table d'hôte dinner with him at his French restaurant. "You 'll feel the need of it before the afternoon 's done," he said.

"We ought to economize."

"Well, let us have one last splurge."

It was, after all, a rather dismal "splurge," for they were both playing their parts with an effort, and their lack of appetite betrayed them. "You 're not eating anything," he accused her. She replied: "I 'm doing as well as you." A moment later, he came out of a staring abstraction to find her studying him. She blushed and looked down at her plate. He had a guilty feeling that she had read his thoughts. They received their dessert in silence.

"Have you heard from your mother?" he asked suddenly.

She admitted, with reluctance, that she had.

"What does she say?"

"Now, I 'm not going to tell you," she answered. "I 've told you I 'm not going home—and that 's all. You 've had worry enough about me. I 'll tell you about it when the proper time comes." She glanced at her watch. "It 's time you were meeting Mr. Pittsey, now."

"Where are you— May I take you to the car?"

"Yes." They rose together. "And you 're not to worry about me, will you?"

He shook his head, without meeting the tender anxiety of her scrutiny. And he parted from her at the steps of an elevated station still guiltily averting his eyes.

To pay for their dinner, he had "broken" his last ten-dollar bill. He wondered whether he might borrow a little money from Bert Pittsey. He supposed that Pittsey was coming to see him about some new

difficulty with Conroy; and he returned to his lodgings in an empty despondence.

As he mounted the steps to Mrs. McGahn's door, he saw that someone was watching him through one of the front windows. As he stepped into the hall, he saw Walter Pittsey standing in the doorway of the parlor, waiting for him. He stopped, incredulous.

"Well, Don Quixote," Walter said, with his usual mild amusement, "I hear you 've been slaughtering supers."

"Why, where did you come from?" Don cried. "I thought it was Bert! When did you arrive?"

He coughed. "Come in here." He took Don by the elbow and led him into the parlor. It was Miss Morris who rose from a chair beside the window and came to greet him with her slow smile.

Don took her hand in silence, looking from her conspiring eyes to Pittsey's and back again. "What is it?" he asked, beginning to tremble at the expectation of he did not know what.

She said, teasingly: "Did n't I tell you to wait until you heard from me?"

He stared at the promise which her words implied, and her face slowly retreated from him as if he had looked at her through the wrong end of a telescope. He was dizzily aware that the floor and ceiling of the room were working up and down like the top and bottom of a bellows. He clung to her hand. "I think . . . I 'd better sit down," he said. "The floor 's—" Pittsey's arm was around him. He stumbled towards a chair. "The floor 's—"

They helped him to one of Mrs. McGahn's horse-hair sofas. Someone chafed his hands. Someone unbuttoned his collar. He heard tense and anxious voices, in the faint distance. "I 'm all right," he said. "I was walking. I 'm tired. I—" His voice faded away above him as he rocked down slowly into darkness.

He came back to consciousness at the chill touch of a wet handkerchief on his forehead and the prickle of ammonia fumes in his nostrils; and he opened his eyes on a splitting headache that seemed to tear his brain. "Thanks," he said, looking up at Miss Morris who was bending over him. "I 'm better, thanks." She put back the wet hair from his forehead and drew the palm of her hand caressingly down his cheek. There were tears in her eyes, but before he could be sure that he had seen them, she had risen and Mrs. McGahn stood in her place, holding a pocket flask of liquor from which Pittsey poured a little into a glass.

"Swallow this."

It ran down his throat like fire. He coughed and sputtered, laughing almost hysterically. In a few moments he was sitting up again, trying to smile rather wanly at his collapse. Then they told him what they had come to tell.

Mr. Polk's treasurer had written to Pittsey in Boston asking him to take charge of the "ticket office end" of the new theater. "We used to work together at the old Academy," Pittsey explained in an aside. And Pittsey's influence with the treasurer had joined Miss Morris's applications to Polk to procure for Don a position in the ticket office at $25 a week. "I saw Kidder

this morning, just after you were there," Pittsey hurried on, "and he told me what you 'd been doing. I 've been trying to connect with you ever since. Kidder said I must have passed you in the elevator as I came up."

Don shook his head, worried by the pain behind his eyes and by Pittsey's evasive explanations. "I did n't come down in the elevator. I walked. I 've been walking ever since." He straightened up, shining-eyed. "How am I ever going to—to thank you two. I—"

"Don't thank me," Pittsey interrupted. "It was Miss Morris."

"What a story!" she said. "I had n't thought of the office. I was trying to get you into the company."

In the light of gratitude in which he saw her, she seemed even more beautiful than she had ever been before; and he looked at her with an expression of face which made Pittsey put in hastily: "The first thing you do, you buy a new overcoat and a new suit of clothes. Kuffman goes by exteriors. Get your hair cut à la Manhattan—and never let him see you smoking a pipe.

"I need shoes, too," Don acknowledged simply.

Pittsey rose. "I 'll call for you to-morrow morning and see you outfitted. Then I 'll introduce you to your new 'job'."

"Wait a moment," Don pleaded. "I want to—"

"No; you must go to your room now and have a sleep," Miss Morris said, bidding him good-bye. "I 'll see you to-morrow, too." And disengaging themselves from Don's confused thanks, they went

away together, waving to him gaily as they turned on the sidewalk and saw him watching them from the open door.

VII

It seems that the sailor who survives a shipwreck accepts the fact of his escape not as a warning of the dangers of his life but as an assurance that they are not deadly, and goes to sea again with a veteran's contempt of storms. The crisis through which Don had passed did nothing to reform his impracticality, but rather developed and confirmed it. "Did n't I tell you we 'd be all right," he exulted to Margaret, celebrating his good fortune in an evening at the theater. "You certainly did," she laughed, "but you did n't look as if you believed it."

"I did, though," he assured her; and he thought that he was telling the truth. "All the time, I felt certain of it. It 'll— Now it 's *your* turn. We 'll organize *your* campaign now, won't we?"

She nodded, to conceal thought. She had not told him what success her afternoon's quest had had, but she had admitted that her mother's letter had ordered her home peremptorily and that she had tried to make the gentle reply that turns away wrath even while it refuses obedience. She was doubtful of the issue of her evasion. "I 'll hear in a day or two."

"Well, don't worry," he counselled her. "I have— If you run out of money, you must let me 'stake' you until you find what you wish."

She touched his arm to silence him as the lights were lowered and the curtain rose; and she let her hand remain on his sleeve either absent-mindedly, or as an apology for turning from him, or merely as a sort of place-mark in their conversation, like a finger on the page of an interrupted reading. It was to Don the tingling pole of an emotion that quivered through him electrically; he sat rigid, for fear that his slightest movement might break the current coming to him out of the darkness in a circuit of friendship and sympathy that joined her to him among all these strangers, secretly, like the hidden clasp of fingers. When, at length, she drew back slowly, he relaxed to an easier position with a sigh.

The play was a "costume drama" in which the love of a court beauty caused duels and intrigues and various dissensions among gentlemen in perukes and satin smalls; and Don listened and watched with his soul in his eyes. It inspired him with the desire to do great deeds, to be famous, to live a colored and wonderful life. It filled him with high desires of love and magnanimity. It raised him above the sordid commonplaces of his commercial days. It intoxicated him with that wine of romance which makes the historical novel the cordial bottle of a shop-wearied civilization. Between the acts, to the quickened sympathy of the girl beside him, he freed himself of an almost vinous need of confiding to someone his ambitions, his vague plans, his shy hopes of a future as a playwright, laughing at himself tentatively but touched to find that she did not laugh too. "I never had a chance to work before," he said. "I have always been worried—by all sorts of

things—and upset. Now, with twenty-five dollars a week, and lots of time to myself, I 'll be able to do something—something worth while." And on their way back to their lodgings—all his worries untangled, and his future as straight and level as the street before him—he walked with her on his arm, as stiffly as a schoolboy who marches beside the music of a military band, almost strutting, his face stern with ambition and as pale as if the shock and glory of battle were awaiting him at the foot of the street.

WALTER Pittsey took him, in the morning, to be "outfitted," and lent him money for his purchases, and advised him on the styles with the experience of a man to whom the art of economical good dressing has been a study. Pittsey knew where to find ready-made clothing that could not be known from tailor-made; he chose a necktie with deliberation; he spent an hour in search of an overcoat that should fill out Don's shoulders and still preserve the distinction of his lean height; he made Don try on several different styles of shoes, frowning and shaking his head as he studied over them; and when he had finished, Don, for thirty dollars, was apparently a young gentleman of fashion dressed in the faultless simplicity of quiet good taste. "Now," Pittsey said, "I 've noticed that you have the English trick of saying 'sir' to your elders. You had better cut it out with Kuffman; he does n't understand that sort of thing, you know. Just behave with him as you did with Kidder, at first—as if— Well, I suppose if

you were conscious of it, you could n't do it. But don't, for anything, let him think you need the 'job'."

The warning was not necessary; for Don was already, unconsciously, playing the part for which his clothes had made him up. He had luncheon with Pittsey, and he accepted the assiduous deference of the waiter with a pleasant condescension. He accepted Kuffman, as he had accepted Kidder, in that boyish indifference of disinterest which had impressed the supers' agent. He was, in fact, content to leave all intercourse with Kuffman in Pittsey's hands. And since the ticket office was to be opened on the morrow, he was able to devote himself to helping Pittsey arrange the tickets in the pigeon-holed case beside the grated window, while he listened attentively to the instructions which Pittsey gave him concerning his small duties as relief man at the wicket during the "off" hours.

"You 'll have to remember that you 're a nickel-in-the-slot machine," Pittsey counselled, "and nothing more. The person outside puts in his money and gets his ticket. Never talk. Answer questions politely, but that 's all. It 's the only way to do the work. Never—never—never talk to anyone through those bars."

Kuffman, who was one of those fat men that overdress like dowagers, came into the office to give final directions about the tickets that were to be placed for sale at various hotel desks; and he asked Don suddenly: "Where did you get the necktie?"

Don turned, in his embarrassment, to Pittsey. "Where *did* we get it?"

Pittsey coughed deliberately. "Do you like it? I have the mate to it. We saw them in ———'s window"—He named a fashionable haberdasher—"and I bought one myself."

Kuffman admired the tie in silence and went out. "Here," Pittsey said, opening his pen-knife, "you 'd better cut the label off that tie. And the next time he asks you about your clothes don't turn to me as if I were your valet."

Don obeyed him, bewildered. "Why did he ask me?"

"I suppose because he wanted to know."

"But you did n't tell him."

"Oh, 'get wise,'" Pittsey laughed. "'Get wise.'"

There were to be other incidents of a like nature in Don's ticket-office experience, but they did not seem to increase his stock of that sort of wisdom which Pittsey wished him to acquire. It was not long, however, before the fact that Don was a Canadian became known to his theatrical associates, and his simplicity was excused by them as the natural ignorance of a foreigner who in his own country would doubtless be "wise" to the strangest of native ways. Pittsey lost his patience for a moment when he found that he must teach his assistant even the art of "making change," for Don tried to subtract the price of a ticket from a five-dollar bill, as if he were doing "mental arithmetic," instead of using his coins as counters after the manner of the experienced clerk. But he was so eager to learn, so grateful for his tuition, and so full of admiration for his teacher that Pittsey could not remain angry with him. And his evident honesty, his devotion

to his duties—which he accepted as a most sobering responsibility—and his engaging gentleness with the public, were qualifications for office that easily outweighed his defects.

He was to find it his good fortune that he was required to be merely an automaton in his work. Shut in behind the brass rods of his window and the wire screen of his locked door, he was to see the public go past in a procession of speaking heads and open hands that asked and were answered, gave, received and disappeared. There was to be something pleasant to him in the fact that although he could hear the slightest whisper of the purchaser at the open window, he had to raise his own voice to make himself heard in reply; that he could speak in an amused aside to Pittsey without being overheard by the expectant head at the wicket; and that the office, glowing with light and warmth, was as comfortable as home to him, while all the rest of the world seemed to be coming, like hungry street-children to a bake-shop window, to stare in at him from the cold darkness, red-nosed and with numb hands.

But these impressions were still in the future; for the present he was busy arranging the office to Pittsey's taste, with some of the glad anticipations of a young housewife moving into a new home. Miss Morris looked in on them for a moment, on her way from rehearsals, but she understood from Pittsey's manner that the ticket office was not to be used for social calls, and she withdrew as soon as possible. "Let me come and see you," Don proposed, as she went.

"But I 'm rehearsing morning, noon and night,"

she said. "We shall have to wait till Sunday—unless I can meet you, some day, at lunch time. I 'll try."

She did not ask him about Margaret, nor did she mention Polk; and Don, with his faculty for self-deception, did not try to look below the smiling surface of her friendliness.

When the office had been closed for the night, he went with Pittsey to have dinner at the latter's hotel; but he went wondering how Margaret had spent the day and wishing that he could think of an excuse for escaping to her. He could not, in friendship, refuse to dine with Walter, but he was glad when Bert Pittsey joined them at table—his pocket full of newspapers and his head full of chatter—for his arrival relieved Don of the burden of conversation, and left him to his thoughts; and while he ate distractedly he went over in memory all the impressions of his busy day, and recalled Margaret, across the crowded interval of separation, as if he had not seen her for a month.

Bert, in his new position as "cub reporter," was doing what he called "leg work," and he had adventures to relate. He gave his account of them with his usual air of young deviltry. "Had an assignment this afternoon to root out a story of an old curb-market stock-sharp who was marrying a woman that owned a Sixth Avenue restaurant. They 've been boarding in the same house. I could n't see either of them, so I had to imagine them. I imagined him a Wall street millionaire who had fallen in love with the beautiful waitress who used to feed him his lunch. It made a great story! The only trouble with reporting is that

you 're hampered by the facts in the case. I could n't say that he 'd fallen in love with her over a plate of corn-beef hash. I had to make it 'It is said' this and 'It is reported' that. That 's the sort of thing that drives so many discouraged newspaper men into magazine work."

Walter heard him with the air of an elder brother listening to a precocious younger one. Don did not hear him at all—until Conroy's name, mentioned in the conversation, caught his ear. Then he looked up to catch Bert saying, in a low aside to Walter: "There 's a lady in the case." And suddenly he remembered the hat and veil which he had seen on the dining-room table.

"What 's the matter?" he asked.

But Bert Pittsey refused to tell. "Excuse *me*," he said. "I don't 'muddle' in any private affairs unless for purposes of publication."

"Who is she?"

He bowed, like a politician declining to be interviewed. "I have nothing whatever to say on that subject at present."

"She was there—was n't she?—when I called the other day?"

"Very sorry, boys, very sorry. But you 'll have to excuse me to-day. Fine weather we 're having, is it not?"

Walter laughed. "You had better keep out of it," he advised Don. "You 'll only get yourself into more trouble."

"Me too," Bert said. "I intend to dissolve partner-

ship with your gentle cousin as soon as possible, and I desire that we shall part without any formal blows."

That was all that Don could learn of the matter. He thought it over. With the arrival of coffee and cigars, he concluded to let the affair rest until Pittsey's dissolution of partnership should make it possible to discover the whole truth. When Walter proposed that they finish the night at a theater, Don said: "I ought to go— I have some letters I should write." But Walter would not hear of such a way of wasting an evening. "You have n't many more nights free," he said. And Don went with them irresolutely.

It was nearly midnight when he returned to his lodgings, but as he came cautiously upstairs he saw a thread of light under Margaret's door. He tapped on a panel and called, under his voice: "How have you been?"

The door burst open as if it had been set on a spring. Margaret confronted him. "Someone— She 's coming! She knows I was on the stage. Someone has told her!"

Confused by the suddenness of the light in his eyes and by the anxious appeal for aid that sounded in the hoarse repression of her voice, he stammered: "Wh-what? Who?"

"Mother! Someone! She does n't say who. She 's coming—on her way—now. She won't wait for me to go. She 's coming for me. What shall I do?"

She waited for him to answer. He said, at last, inadequately: "Well, tell her you won't go."

"But she 'll *make* me!"

"How can she?"

"She 's—she 's my mother! I can't—"

"Well," he said weakly, "suppose she is. She can't take you if you don't want to go."

She stepped into the hall and drew the door to, behind her. "But what can I say? What can I tell her? I—I 've failed to get anything. I 've been going all day—yesterday too—and there is n't anything—nothing! They all tell me I 'm not far enough advanced, that I should go home and study, and come down again in a year or two. I have nothing to tell her—not even a prospect of anything. I can't—I have to— I won't have even a home. I have n't any money—"

He put in eagerly: "That 's all right. I have plenty now—enough for both of us."

"But if I don't— I may *never*. It may be years. I—"

"I don't care—as long as you stay."

"But I can't! I can't do that. Don't you understand?"

The hall was dark; he could not see her face. But there was an almost tearful exasperation in her voice, and he hurried to plead against that tone: "Don't leave me now, when everything 's beginning to go right, when I 'm just beginning to be able to help you. I can't let you go. What right has *she*? What has she to offer—"

"But you— She 's my mother. *That* 's her right. I can't tell her— I have n't *anything* to tell her. It 's *you*— it 's *we*—that have no right."

"Well, what can I do? What do you want me to do? Shall *I* see her?"

"What good would that do?"

There was a despair of him in her voice. He reached her hand in the darkness, as if to hold her to the friendly sympathy of the past few days. "Don't— Don't—"

"But Don," she whispered, coming as if unconsciously to the arm that supported her, "what are we to do? I know— I don't want to go. I don't want to leave you." Her hand was on his shoulder; he held her like a lover. "We must be practical. We can't—"

"I will," he choked. "I 'll think of something. Don't let her take you away. I could n't live here now, without you. I—"

There was the rustle of a stealthy movement on the landing below them. She tried to draw back. He held her to a hurried "Good-night" and the kiss that accompanied it. He felt her relax in his arms. "Good-night," she whispered, warm against his cheek—and immediately she was gone.

He fumbled his way upstairs to his room, in the blind darkness, mechanically, every conscious faculty of his mind still entangled, bewildered, enraptured by the transport and sudden ecstacy of that caress.

VIII

The thought with which he awoke in the morning was the resolve to which he had held himself as he fell asleep overnight: that he must do something decisive at once. He had no time to lose; her mother might arrive at any moment; they must be prepared with a plan of action to meet her.

There was one plan that was the obvious solution of their difficulty; but he found something repellent in the thought that he should take advantage of Margaret's situation to force her where her heart, perhaps, did not yet make her willing to go. He had looked forward to their marriage as a sort of crowning event for his success in life, when he would be able to offer her the happiness of his prosperity and give her a home worthy of her and of his love. He could not ask her to share a garret with him. He had even a ridiculous shame of letting her see the poverty of his wardrobe, of introducing her to the makeshifts of his dressing room. His ideal of her demanded that she should be won by nobility and devotion, after the long persuasion of a courtship—not hurried into marriage like a girl of the tenements, against her will, by the pleading of a lover who would use her necessity to force her.

But in the meantime he might lose her. He must find a way to temporize. He must find it at once. And although it was not yet seven o'clock by his watch, he washed and dressed as if he had not a second to spare. The first thing to do was to consult with her. He knew that she would be awake. He tip-toed downstairs and tapped on her door. "Yes?" she answered.

"Come out," he said. "I 'll wait at the front door for you."

He heard her patter, bare-footed, across the floor. He went below and stood outside on the old "stoop," looking down on the hurry of clerks and shop-girls on their way to the elevated trains that would return them to drudgery. The sky was a sombre wash of smudged grey, heavy, unrefreshed, as if the day had been wak-

ened too soon and was still sulky for lack of sleep. The air was thick with the chill and odor of night-damps. He buttoned his overcoat resolutely and put on his gloves. "Now," he said to himself, "let us see. What shall we do?"

The question was still unanswered—though he was pacing up and down the pavement with it, vainly trying to think—when he saw her descending the steps to the sidewalk. He hastened to meet her. "Have you thought of anything?"

She blushed faintly. "No."

"We must," he said. "Your mother may arrive any moment now. Does she know your address?"

"Yes."

"She 'll come direct to the house, then?"

"I suppose so."

"Let us get away from here."

He turned his back on the bustle of Sixth Avenue and led her toward the quieter streets of old Greenwich. She went in a silence which left the affair wholly in his hands; and he frowned over it diligently.

He began: "It won't cost me ten dollars a week to live now, and I have twenty-five. Why can't you take the rest—the fifteen—for as long as you 'll need it, and just tell your mother that you have money to keep you here and you intend to stay?"

"Because I—" He did not understand her confusion. "Because I *can't.*"

"Why can't you?"

"How can I? I have no— There 's no reason why you—"

"Yes there is. There 's every reason." She shook

her head. "Yes there is," he insisted. "I 've been waiting— I 've been planning here, working and everything—because I knew you 'd come to New York. And now, ever since you 've been here, I 've been—I 've been so— Have n't *you* been happy? Do you want to go?"

"No," she said gently. "I don't, Don. But it—perhaps it would be wiser for me to go home for a while and then come back again." She added hastily, seeing the tragic change in his face: "I 'll come back. Then when you 're—when you 're more sure of everything—This is the first time you 've had an opportunity to do your work, without being worried and upset. I don't know that I shall ever find anything. Not for years. I need to study. I could do that at home—study—while I 'm teaching. We could write to each other. We could . . . wait."

"Wait!" His voice was almost a groan. "Have n't I waited? Have n't I been waiting all my life?" She took his arm to check him. He went on passionately: "I can't wait. I can't live here alone. I can't let you go again. I can't."

"Ssh!" She looked askance at the windows they were passing. "If we— If I did n't go, and then anything happened, I 'd be—"

"What do I care what happens as long as you don't go! You could n't be any worse off than you 'd be at home. Besides, nothing *can* happen. I 'll see to that. Stay with me. Don't leave me. I—"

"Oh Don!" She clung to his arm. "We must be *practical.*"

"Practical! What do I care whether we 're practi-

cal or not as long as we 're happy. I won't let you go! I won't give you up! If you leave me again, I 'll—I 'll go after you."

A man, approaching, stared as he came, and then, when he was near enough to see their expressions, he looked away guiltily, as if he had spied on a family quarrel. When he had passed, Margaret said, brokenly: "It 's so unreasonable! Blaming me! It 's only for your sake—"

"Then stay for my sake," he pleaded. "I 'm only here—I 'm only working for you. The money 's for you. Everything I do is for you." She fumbled at the handkerchief in the bosom of her jacket. "We 've been so happy. And now, with my work come out right —and all—to go away and leave it—You won't! Say you won't."

She wiped her eyes in a frantic shame of such public emotion. "But what will we *do*?"

"We 'll do what we have been doing. Was n't that all right? I have my work now, and what do we care how long it takes to find yours? We 'll find it someday, just as I 've found mine, and we 'll be together, and happy. You *were* happy, were n't you?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Well then, what does anything else matter? That 's all I ask, to have you with me, so that I can be happy and try to make you happy. Your mother can't do it —any more than my father can make *me* happy. She has n't anything to offer you except what will make us both miserable. She has n't even money. You 'll have to work at what you don't like. And here you can wait until you find what you *do* like."

He did not voice the thought that was behind this temporizing—the thought that in the days to come he would win her to the act that would relieve her of all necessity of finding work for herself. But she knew that the thought was there, and she accepted it unsaid.

They had walked into a street that ended in a cul-de-sac, and they had to stop and retrace their steps; but his arguments, his pleadings, his promises went on without interruption, in a current against which she no longer tried to struggle. They lost themselves in a maze of those old Greenwich by-paths that wandered in aimless turns and circlings between rows of quaint red-brick houses with colonial doors and brass knockers. They came unexpectedly on a busy thoroughfare, noisy with street-car traffic, and he did not recognize it; but by this time she had surrendered her last objection, and they made a truce of their troubles in their attempts to discover where they were. A policeman directed them to a street that would return them to Sixth Avenue. They went back toward their little restaurant, for breakfast, in the silence of hunger and spent emotions.

He regained his usual optimism at the table, but he found that he could not raise her from her despondent apprehensions, and he had to content himself with the thought that after her mother had come and gone she would return to happiness. He parted from her in the hallway outside her door, exacting her meek promise that she would allow nothing to force her to leave him. He held her hand, lingering, on a desire to make a fonder leave-taking; but she seemed withdrawn from him by her anxiety, and he was afraid to intrude his love on

her. "Good-bye," he said. "I shall not be able to have luncheon with you, but I 'll be here at six o'clock."

She replied, dispiritedly: "Good-bye."

THE million interests of his morning's work rushed in over the thought of her in a confusion of incessant demands on his attention; for Pittsey, in order to break in his assistant to his duties, stood back from the wicket and made Don "handle the sale," interfering only to prevent an error or straighten out a snarl. "Sink or swim," he said, when Don faltered and wiped his forehead. "It 's the only way you 'll ever learn." Long before noon Don's head was aching and his wrists were weak, but his hands were beginning to move deftly, his voice came calm, and he had moments when he gained that mental detachment of the expert ticket seller who can do two things at once and watch himself doing them as if the thought and the action were the functions of two separate minds. "Now," Pittsey said, "you had better get your lunch and have a smoke. Don't come back here for an hour."

Don dropped his duties like a weight, with the feeling that he could not have supported the strain for another five minutes. Miss Morris was waiting for him in the foyer. "Goodness!" He took his breath, smiling and shaking his head at her. "I 'm almost done out."

"Come along," she laughed. "What you need is a beefsteak and a glass of ale."

They went to a chop-house where he took the beefsteak but, to her amusement, declined the ale. She watched his plate like a grandmother, making him eat,

but refusing to let him talk; and he was so grateful to her for her thoughtfulness that he did not ask himself whether it had not been she who had found a way to let Mrs. Richardson know that Margaret was on the stage. She spoke of indifferent matters: of her change of boarding-house, of Mr. Polk's new play, of the hope that if Polk's theater were a success she might not have "to leave Broadway" all winter, of Miss Arden's "hit" in a comic opera, of the affairs of the "profession" at large. He listened, too tired to do more than smile. He returned with her to the theater, rested and refreshed.

The afternoon passed as quickly as the morning had, but with less strain; for the first rush for tickets was over, and he worked with greater ease. When the box office closed, he excused himself to Walter, on the plea of an "engagement," and cut through the crowds to his car like the most breathless of those New Yorkers whose haste he had once envied as he sat idle in Union Square.

He ran upstairs to her room and rapped joyfully. Mrs. McGahn opened the door to him. He stared. "Where is she?"

"She 's here. But it 's no thanks to *you*! Come in here."

"What 's the matter?" He came in wonderingly, and stopped, frightened, at the sight of Margaret lying on a sofa. "Is she sick?"

"Sick! If she ain't, it 's a wonder! I 'd be sick meself!"

"Mother 's been here," Margaret said faintly, her back to him.

"An' *you* 're the sweet one!" Mrs. McGahn broke in. "To go off an' leave *her* to fight yer battles fer yuh. What 're yuh thinkin' of, to do it, man?"

He did not reply to her. He had scarcely heard her. He came to the foot of the sofa as awkwardly as a boy in a sick room. "What 's the matter?"

She rolled her head on the cushion. "I 'll have to go home."

He dropped his hat. "Why?"

"Why?" Mrs. McGahn echoed. "Why! Because she 's the girl's mother, ain't she?" She stopped at the ghastliness of his face. "Well, dang yuh," she cried in a humorous Irish exasperation, "yuh 're the biggest fool alive. If yuh want the girl, why don't yuh marry her? Shilly-shallyin', an' kissin' in the halls at night, an' tormentin' her with yer goin's on! Why don't yuh marry her an' tell her mother to go off an' mind her bus'ness? Here!" She closed the door and came back to front him like a magistrate. "What 're yuh up to, young man? Will yuh marry her, er will yuh not? Fer, by the jukes, now, if yuh won't, yuh 'll go out o' here this blessed minut' an' the girl 'll go home in the mornin' to where she belongs! Now! Out with it!"

Margaret struggled to get up, rising on her elbow. "Mrs. McGahn!" she cried piteously.

"Be still, you." She rounded on Don again. "It 's take it er leave it! She can't stay here—an' *I* won't have her here. She 's her mother's daughter until she 's a wedded woman an' out o' danger. An' home she 'll go!"

Don did not so much as look at her. He was appealing to the girl with his eyes. "Don't go." he said hoarsely. "If you—if you 'll do it. If you care enough for me to let me—"

Mrs. McGahn, with a sudden understanding of what he was trying to say, took him by the arm and drew him to Margaret's side. "Here!" she said, and turning from them, she marched out of the room.

IX

WHEN she looked in again, Don was sitting on the edge of the sofa, in the dusk; the girl was in his arms; she was crying on his shoulder. Mrs. McGahn smiled. "Well?"

Don looked around with a drawn face. "Is she back, Mrs. Richardson?"

"No, she ain't," she blustered, exaggeratingly. "An' she won't be, till mornin'. I put her out o' the house, hot-foot. Persecutin' the child!"

"I told her I would n't go until the morning, until I had seen you," Margaret sobbed.

"That will give us plenty of time." He asked Mrs. McGahn shakily: "Do you know anyone—around here—who 'll do to—"

"Are yuh Cath'lics?"

"No. We 're—"

"Neither am I. If yuh 'd been Cath'lics, I 'll be

danged if I know how they marry. I 'm Orange meself, an' so 's Dan. Who 's yer min'ster?"

"I don't know. I have n't any." He shook his head, in a helpless perplexity.

She snorted. "Yuh young heathen! Yuh deserve no better than bein' married be an alderman. That 'll teach yuh to go to church. It 's well fer yuh that I 'm a married woman—with daughters like me." She waved him to the door. "Go get a cab—an' a weddin' ring!" She wailed: "An' my dinner in the oven!" She stopped him: "Wait! Do yuh know the size? No! There 's a man now! As helpless as the babe at a christ'nin'! Have y' even a bit o' string? No, not a bit!" She caught up Margaret's glove from the dresser. "Take that—to a jeweler's. Go on! Be off with yuh! Take yer hat, man!" She drove him out, and he went clutching the glove in one hand, his hat in the other. She called down the stairs after him: "It 's a four wheeler yuh 'll want, mind yuh!" She shrieked, at the next landing: "An' a witness! I 'm one! Yuh 'll want two!"

If Don had any clear idea of what he was doing at the time, certainly he had no clear recollection, afterwards, of how he had done it. He found what he supposed was a jeweler's shop—though subsequently, in pointing it out to Margaret, he saw that it was a pawnbroker's. He bought a ring—that must have been an "unredeemed pledge"—without knowing what he paid for it. The man behind the glass show-case called him back to give him the glove, which he had forgotten; and he

drifted down the street, looking for a livery stable, holding the ring in his bare hand like a child with a penny, struggling absent-mindedly to put on the glove —which was Margaret's—and bewildered to find that his hand had grown too large for it. The hostler of a boarding-stable directed him to a livery near by, and he succeeded in hiring a cab, though he had the feeling that he was speaking a foreign language and had difficulty in finding his words. The livery man understood the situation when Don, trying to pay in advance, found that the money he had in his hand was a wedding ring. "That 's all right," the man grinned. "I been there. Put that in yer vest pocket an' ferget where it is." And he and the driver, having sympathetically helped Don to remember the address of Walter Pittsey's hotel, shut him in the cab and started the horses.

That drive was to remain in his memory as a smell of mildewed leather-cushions and a sea-sickening darkness of rocking pitches, with street lights swimming by on the shores. He disembarked at a blazing hotel front and walked wide to the desk, over the black and white marble squares of a tesselated floor. Walter Pittsey was nowhere to be found. The clerk, after answering several futile questions, edged away from him and pretended to be busy looking up nothing in the telephone directory. Don wandered back to his cab, remembered Bert Pittsey, and gave the address to the driver on the box. He stood beside the front wheels until the man said: "Yes 'ur. Jus' get inside now an' we 'll start. See yuh shut the door."

It followed, naturally, that Don held the door shut

until the cab had stopped at Pittsey's number. Then, alighting from the door which he had been holding, he found himself in the middle of the street and had difficulty in distinguishing the house.

Pittsey said afterwards: "He came in on me without knocking, and he looked as if he had just been wakened up and did n't quite know where he was." It struck Don at the time that Pittsey behaved as if he had been invited out to see a three-alarm fire; for, after his first staring amazement—half-risen from the dining table, with a knife in his hand—he shouted and snatched at his overcoat and came laughing.

"Where 's *he?* Conroy?" Don asked, in the carriage.

"He 's running a quiet wedding of his own," Bert said; and because Don could not make sense of the reply, he did not ask any more questions.

He was worried by a sinking sensation in his stomach which had made it difficult for him to judge the length and reach of his legs, particularly in going up or coming downstairs. For that reason, he left it to Pittsey to tell Mrs. McGahn that the cab was at the door; and when the voluble landlady appeared, behind her voice —like an actor who is heard shouting in the wings before he makes his entrance on the stage—Don sank back against the cushions, under cover of her garrulity, in a personal silence that was aware of Margaret at his side in every tingling nerve.

He lost her again when he came on the confusing necessity of remembering his name, his age, his color and the number of times that he had been married before—filling out the document required by law. He

signed it laboriously and gave up the pen to Pittsey, after trying to put it in his pencil pocket. He moved like a dummy to his place before a table in the minister's parlor, being divided against himself by the fact that the affair reminded him of his first rehearsal in "The Rajah's Ruby"—until he was asked to repeat, after the clergyman, the words of the service, and then he stood, with Margaret, as if in the infant class at Sabbath school, shakily reciting verses which he did not understand. He put the ring on her finger as clumsily as if he were trying to thread a needle; and when Mrs. McGahn whispered loudly "Salute yer bride! Kiss yer wife!" he kissed her beside the nose, stiff with an intensity of emotion, the tears in his eyes.

Pittsey wrung his hand. "Good boy!" he said. "You did it well." And Don smiled the foolish smile of bridegrooms.

"Now," Mrs. McGahn announced, "yuh 'll all come back an' have yer weddin' supper with me—if that woman has n't burned it to flitters." Pittsey was paying the minister. Margaret was looking, a little frightened, at her husband as if she did not quite recognize him. "Come along with yuh! All of yuh! Will yuh come, Mr. Cobbett?" The Reverend J. Sanderson Cobbett excused himself in a low voice that contrasted with her excited pitch of hospitality. She was not discouraged. "Come along, Mr. Pitty. I can't offer yuh weddin' cake an' wine—" Pittsey saw the desire of escape in Don's look of misery—"but Dan 'll make y' a punch that 'll keep yuh grinnin' fer a whole honeymoon—"

"I 'm afraid you 'll have to make it a wedding break-

fast, Mrs. McGowan," he excused them. "I ordered supper for them at their hotel."

"There!" she said. "I knowed I 'd be disappointed some way. Never mind! I 've had a weddin' anyway." She cuddled Margaret. "Yuh spoke up like a trump, girl. Come along. Drive me home, now. Sure I 'm an ol' fool." She had suddenly been overtaken in her turn by the usual desire to weep. "I s'pose Dan 'll be growlin' fer his grub like a bear with a sore ear. Yuh 're young yet. God give yuh happiness. Yuh 'll be good to her, Mr. Gregg, now. She 's give yuh all she 's got."

She crammed with good advice the few minutes of the drive back to her home; and she kissed Margaret at the cab-door, and ran upstairs for the girl's valise—which she had packed ready—and kissed her again when she came back with it. When she saw that Don had not his bag, she lost her tender emotion in the scolding haste of helping him to get it. By this time her husband was at the door and all the lodgers were in the windows; and when Pittsey at last got the cab under way, she threw an old slipper after them, and hit one of the gaping street-children on the head with it. They escaped while she was trying to comfort the injured youngster.

"A worthy woman," Pittsey said. "Next to a wake, they do enjoy a wedding. Where am I taking you now?"

They did not know. Don explained, rather uncertainly, that he had not made any arrangements of any sort. "Mrs. McGahn—"

"Enough said," Pittsey interrupted. "Let me dis-

pose of you. Your cousin has divorced me—for a handsomer girl—and I have a flat on my hands. I 'm giving up housekeeping, and I 'll sell the outfit. Or if you don't want to buy, I 'll give it to you. Anyway, take it for the time being, until you find a better place. I 'm going to join Walt. You get your suppers, and by the time you arrive at my former rooms you 'll find them ready for you and the key of the dining room under the door mat. Turn it to your left and walk in. The rent won't be due for a week."

Don was as incapable of argument as he was of suggesting any better plan; and Pittsey, having stopped the cab at a street corner, shook hands with them smilingly, gave directions to the cabman and watched them drive off.

They went in darkness, in silence, side by side. At the turning of a corner, Don said, out of an emotion that had evidently been throttling him: "We 're—we 're married!"

"Oh Don," she cried, "we should n't have! We should n't have done it!"

He put an arm about her. "Wait!" he exulted. "Just wait till I show you. Just you—just you wait! We 'll be the *happiest!*"

X

It is the triumph of the imaginative man that he makes the best lover in the world; and Don's love had been, for so long, the faith of his life that even the realities

of married intercourse did not more than ritualize it into a religion. If Margaret had been unable to appreciate it in its silent devotions, she thrilled and glowed to it now that it had become voluble and formulary. And like so many women who marry young, her maiden sentiment was a pale and mild affection compared with the passionate surrender of the wife. Even the discomforts of their honeymoon days in Pittsey's flat were lost in the sunrise flush of happiness that made all beautiful. Even her mother's anger softened into a natural misunderstanding which the girl sympathized with and forgave.

As for Don, he had arrived at the promised land. His great dream had come true. He felt that no hope could be too extravagant since this impossibility had come to pass. He hurried home at night, from the long day's separation, eager to bill and coo, to plan new joys for their future and to recall the vicissitudes of their past. He had to discover when it was that she had really, first, begun to love him. He had to be assured endlessly that she was happy. He had to sit over their late supper, basking in the comforts of domesticity, contrasting these full days of their companionship with the hungry ones he had come through. If she smiled at the wildness of his castle-building, he replied: "Well, would you have believed, a month ago, that we 'd be *here*? You leave this to me. I 'll do it. First we 'll move into a comfortable flat. Then I 'll write the bulliest play *ever*—and get Miss Morris the lead in it. Then I 'm going to get Conroy on his feet. Then, as soon as the theater closes for the summer, we 're go-

ing on our honeymoon to Coulton—to see mother. Then—"

Meanwhile, Miss Morris had not returned to the theater, and when he attempted to see her, he was told that she was ill. When he learned from Walter Pittsey that she had left Polk's company, he endeavored to find out what had happened; and Pittsey replied, oracularly: "You know more about it than I do." Subsequently, Don heard that she had "gone on the road." Finally, he read in a dramatic paper that she was leading woman in a San Francisco stock company; and he wrote to her. But he did not understand her part—much less her purpose—in bringing about the events that had led up to his hasty marriage; and he did not understand why she had fallen back into that strange silence of life from which she had so suddenly emerged upon him.

He moved to a little, uptown, top-floor flat which Margaret and he furnished "on the instalment plan," dignifying the tiny front room with a rented piano for her and a library writing-table for him. She was to practise her music while he wrote on his plays. They settled down to that dual program of ambitious work, happy in their nest under the eaves. Walter Pittsey became a frequent visitor, and Margaret encouraged him to come, because he tried to aid and advise Don in his play-writing. He even endeavored to interest Polk in one of Don's manuscripts, and was not surprised to find that Polk—though he pronounced the play itself "awful stuff, awful"—was puzzled and amused by Don as if by a new specimen of young human nature to

be studied and perhaps reproduced. He drew Don out, at their odd meetings in the box office, professed to see possibilities in Don's "Winter" as a sort of spectacular extravaganza, asked him to write it out, and quizzed him, with the soberest countenance, about his views of life. Only to Pittsey, Polk confessed: "I don't believe he 'll write a play, if he lives to be a thousand."

"Why not?"

"I 'll tell you why." He gulped his glass of whiskey and water, at the bar. "For the same reason that no woman has ever written a big play. Did you ever think of it? Lots of women have written first-class novels. One or two have written great poetry. Almost none have written any music worth considering. And fewer still have written even passable plays. And I 'll tell you why! Because women are sensitive and emotional and artistic, but they 're not strong enough to subdue emotion to the ends of art, d' you see? And the more stiff the laws of your art, the more impossible it is for them to handle it. Music 's bad enough! Pure emotion expressed in rules of harmony that are like mathematics! But a play, man! Why a play 's the most d——d intricate piece of mechanism that was ever put together. And to make it live, you have to be the master of life as well as the slave of it." He laughed abruptly. "That 's the truth I 'm telling you. I just read it in a newspaper."

"And you think that 's the trouble with Gregg?"

"That 's the trouble with Gregg. He 's as sensitive as a woman, but he lives like a woman, and he 'll never write a d——d thing! He 's too deep in his own emo-

tions." He added: "Lucky beggar! Life 's worth while when you can live it as much as he does."

"He 's happy, certainly."

"Happy! Of course, he 's happy. He 's too happy to write. And when he 's miserable, he 'll be too miserable to write."

"Well," Pittsey reflected, "I suppose it 'll not hurt him to try."

"No. And he 'll be happier trying than he would be if he had in it him to succeed."

He was certainly happy, trying—though he was perhaps happier talking about how happy both Margaret and he were to be when he should succeed. He worked at his manuscript of "Winter" undiscouraged by the sudden abatement of Walter's enthusiasm; but he did nothing to force himself into the way of success. He had a faith in his future that made him almost court a present obscurity; and he looked out on the world from the grating of his ticket window, amused to see that the public mistook him for what he seemed to be. His letters to his mother were full of dark hints of this faith in himself, but to no one else did he write a word of it. He did not write to his aunt or his uncle at all; for he had learned the whole truth of Conroy's "lady in the case," and he preferred rather to be silent than to be a hypocrite.

That "lady" was the young woman whom Conroy had found to do the housework at the time Bert Pittsey took his staff position on the newspaper. He had found her in want, on the streets. And he was living with her, now—an idle "remittance man"—no one knew quite

where. When Bert Pittsey wished to see him, he looked either in the smoking-room of the Mills Hotel, south of Washington Square, or in a little Italian caffè and music hall, near by, in Sullivan Street. Don, too, had gone to see him at this "charity house," but Conroy had refused to recognize him, beyond leaving the smoking-room when he saw his cousin come in; and Don had hurried away, ashamed of the appearance of having spied on his old friend's degradation.

It touched him, like a tragedy. He brooded over the thought of Conroy wandering about those foul streets of the tenements, alone, or befriended only by a woman more unfortunate and unhappy than he. By contrast with Don's own happiness the picture was to him appalling. He remembered their boyish companionship in Coulton and the day that Conroy had brought Margaret to the little ravine. He foresaw another meeting that would bring Margaret to Conroy and insensibly reclaim the outcast and make him, in time, a part of a new life in which they three would be united as they had been once. And Don foresaw that meeting and its issue so vividly that he believed he had only to arrange it in order to make his most impossible hopes come true.

He spoke of it to Bert Pittsey, and Pittsey shook his head. "I don't believe you can do anything for him unless you put new nerves into his stomach. I talked to him after you left us, that time. He knows what he 's doing, but he can't stop. The craving 's too strong for him. You had better leave him alone."

"But if we were to get him away from it? If we were to get him into a sanitarium?"

"If! If! How are you to do it? As soon as you

try to interfere with him, he flies off the handle. He knows he can't help *himself* but he just has bull-headedness enough not to allow anyone else to help him."

Don thought it over. "If I can arrange a plan, will you join me?"

Pittsey nodded. "Sure enough. I 'm game."

But Don could think of no practical plan. He could foresee a hundred different successful conclusions for his efforts, but not the details of a single method of attaining these ends. It was not until the approach of Christmas that the vaguest idea of a possible procedure occurred to him. Then, arranging with Margaret a Christmas Eve dinner to which they were to invite the Pittseys, he said suddenly: "And Conroy! Why could n't we get Conroy?"

"Do you think we could?" She had heard the whole story from Don, and it had not left her hopeful. "Do you think he 'd come?"

"Yes. If we go the right way about it. I must get Bert to help. If we could once get him here—"

"I hope he won't spoil the dinner."

He did not sympathize with this consideration of the young hostess. "Nonsense!" he cried. "What does it matter about the dinner?" He hastened to explain, apologetically, when he saw her expression: "No, of course not! He 'll not spoil it. He 'll be the jolliest of the lot of us. You should have seen some of the dinners we had in our old rooms—one on the day he first found work here. He 'll be all right, if we can only get him. I must ask Bert."

His mother, a few days before, had sent him a bundle of the Christmas numbers of the illustrated English

papers, full of just such pictures as Frankie and he used to tack up on the walls of their playroom; and they had come to him with such an almost tearful memory of the life he had left, that he saw in them, now, a powerful agent to help him in his appeal to Conroy. "I 'll go with Bert," he said, "and try to have a talk with him. I 'll take those papers mother sent, as an excuse. And if he won't see me, I 'll mail them to him, and write him a letter."

He imagined the letter—a Christmas letter of eloquent good-feeling and a manly offer to let bygones be and begin the future afresh. Remembering his Dickens, he had faith in the influence of the season of peace and goodwill to aid him in his miracle of regeneration.

He made his attempt on one of those unseasonable wet nights that make Christmas week in New York a time of drizzling misery and bedraggledness. Down among the tenements the streets were brimful of muddy slush; the trestles of the elevated railroad dripped a fluid grime; the street lights struggled against the fog with the feebleness of guttered candles; the damp air freshened the evil odors of the quarter to a pungency that seemed to Don to reach his palate. He shivered, with his collar to his ears, hugging his bundle of Christmas papers under his arm, trying to convince himself that all this doubled ugliness of wet filth and poverty would aid him in his attack on Conroy. But he no longer tried to convince Pittsey, who was tired by his long day's work on scattered "assignments" and inclined to be sarcastic in his replies to Don's optimism. They went in silence, slipping on the uneven flagstones on which the fog had

congealed in a film of ice. When they came to the many-windowed block of the Mills Hotel, as square and formal as a prison of cells, Pittsey said: "You wait outside for me here until I see him. He 'll quarrel with me for bringing you if I take you in."

Don waited. After the first few minutes, he was encouraged to think that at least Bert had found Conroy where they had planned to find him—probably smoking and playing solitaire at one of the little tables in that room of homeless loafers with its cement floor and its vile smells of cheap tobacco. And if he was there, it was proof that he was sober, since the rules of the house admitted no drunkards to enjoy its steam heat and its comfortable chairs. As the interval of waiting lengthened dismally, he repented having allowed Bert to go in alone, for he had no faith in the adroitness of Pittsey's address and he feared that the whole undertaking might be brought to failure by a false beginning. Several times he had made up his mind to follow in and try to save the situation, but each time the resolution exhausted itself in gazing through the swing doors at the lighted hall where several of the better-dressed patrons of the house stood talking. After all, it would be wiser to wait until he heard what Pittsey had to say.

He was at the door again, standing irresolute, with his hand on it, unable to gather the impulse to push it open. He saw Pittsey coming hurriedly, with his head down. He threw back the door. "It 's no go," Pittsey said. "Come away. Come away."

Don came as far as the sidewalk, but stopped there. "What does he say?"

"Oh 'say'!" Pittsey answered angrily. "It 's not

a question of what he says! Leave him alone! He 's enjoying the delights of his private inferno hot enough without us coming down here to poke it up for him."

"Would n't he come to the dinner?"

Pittsey was walking up the street, Don hanging back reluctantly. "No. He won't come to the dinner. He does n't even want to hear that there 's a dinner for him to come to. Say!" He rounded on Don suddenly. "He has the willies, if you know what that is. You 'll only drive him into trouble—just as you 've always done. And it 's a dirty shame to be bothering him. We can't do anything for him, and he knows it. He can't do anything for himself—and he knows it. What he needs is chloroform to put him out of his misery. I don't believe in this particular form of vivisection, if you want to know!"

"It— It seems to me that if we 're ever going to get him away, we— we ought to be able to do it now—while he 's—"

"Yes! Well, if you could see his face when he 's trying not to talk about it, you would n't relish the job."

Don turned over the papers in his hand, looking down at them. "I wish you 'd taken these in to him."

"Go and take them yourself. Do!"

"Is n't there any place I could leave them for him? I 'd rather write."

Pittsey laughed harshly. "By all means, write!"

"Could I leave them at the hotel?"

"No. He 's not known at the hotel any more than a hundred other tramps that come in there to get warm."

Don winced. "How about the place—the other place where you—"

They were standing under a corner light, and Don, for all his meekness, was stubbornly unmoved by Pittsey's impatience to be away and done with the whole matter.

"Look here," Pittsey said. "If I take you there and leave them for him, that 's all. You can do what you like about it. I 'll not wait another minute for you, you understand?"

"Yes."

"Come on then."

He walked as rapidly as his uncertain footing permitted, and Don staggered along beside him, between the dull glow of little shop-front windows and the churned sludge of the gutters, seeing only these two features of the streets, for his eyes were busy picking out a foothold on the treacherous stones. Pittsey stopped before a basement saloon that was down three stone steps below the level of the sidewalk. "Give me your papers." He left Don gazing at an arch of frosted gas globes bearing the sign "Caffè Sociale." On a board beside the entrance, there had once been painted: "Giuoco di Boccia." Through the dirty windows he saw a fat Italian serving drinks over the bar—Italians sitting at round tables with their feet in sawdust—more Italians playing a game of billiards that included five pins set up as if for a miniature game of bowls. Whenever the door opened, he smelled a warm odor of damp sawdust and stale beer, and he heard the squeak of a violin and the punctuating loud note of a cornet. He saw Pittsey pass the papers over the bar and turn back to the door again. And with a sudden resolution, Don

stumbled down the steps and met him. "I 'm going to wait and see him," he said. "You need n't stay."

Pittsey passed him without replying, and disappeared up the steps into the fog. Don went in, shut the door behind him and faced a tragic adventure.

XI

He was aware, at once, that the bar-room was only a sort of foyer to a larger music hall in which he could see an audience seated at tables before a little stage on which a woman stood to sing; and he hurried into that hall in the hope of escaping notice in the larger gathering. He found a table in a corner and sat down trembling with audacity. A soiled waiter polished off the beer stains from the table top and bent to take his order. He said, throatily: "Bring me a cigar."

It came—in a glass with three matches—a long "rat-tail" Italian cigar. He lit it and drew one puff that had the taste of scorched rags. He held it, fuming, before him, and waited for Conroy to appear, watching the animated faces of Italians whose excited volubility had no meaning for him, and listening to the screaming high notes of the cantatrice who sang with a distortion of mouth that might have been studied in a dentist's chair. It was all as unreal to him as lunacy; and an old man with a basket of macaroons on his arm, who wandered from table to table mumbling "Bene cotti, bene cotti," had a horrid face—as brown and wrinkled as a baked apple—that made the whole

scene in some way confusedly hideous to Don. He stared at three Italians at a table who were blowing out the matches with which a fourth tried to light his cigar, making an unearthly laughter—at a little girl who drank from a glass of beer primly and dried her lips with a dirty handkerchief after each sip—at the foreign faces, the exaggerated gestures, the sudden movements of strange men, who had for him only the semi-human appearance of so many monkeys doing tricks.

He was leaning his elbow on the table, his head on his arm, relapsed into a blank depression of spirits —beaten upon by the loud music and suffocated by the foul smells—when Conroy appeared at the entrance of the hall, and Don ducked his head to hide his face. He looked up under his fingers. Conroy had seated himself at a table against the opposite wall. When the waiter turned away from him, Don could see him, as pale as despair, shabby, unshaven, staring listlessly. Don shut his eyes. The heat had dried them so that the touch of tears was painful.

When he looked again, the waiter had returned with a glass of liquor and the bundle of papers which Pittsey had left at the bar; and Conroy, after vainly trying to understand the man's explanation in Italian, nodded and tried to smile and sent him away. He drank half the glass at a gulp and settled back in his chair, drumming on the table with shaking fingers.

The woman on the stage was singing the "Marseillaise." She followed it with "The Watch on the Rhine," the Russian national anthem, and the Austrian. She announced "God Save Or Caween," and Conroy

frowned at her. Her voice rang in the little hall with the deep notes of the old song. It soared with the triumph of "Senda her veectorious, happa an' gloreeous," and Conroy drew down the brim of his hat and muttered. It faded into a whisper, sweet as old memories, with its prayerful "Goda save or ca-ween." And Conroy tried to drown it in the draught of poisonous whiskey that was left in his glass.

For that song had come on him—as it had come on Don—with the perfume of old days from the life he had lost. It had seized and shaken him, as remembered music will. He called for more drink, fearfully aware of the approach of that self-horror against which he had been fighting when Pittsey came to aid it—afraid of the weakness of vain regret, struggling up from the terrible despondency that was clutching at him. And the tune haunted him with the loyal voices of youths singing together, with the clink of social glasses at a college dinner drinking the queen's health, with the far note of a military band across the sunny campus. He fought against it, working the muscles of his face. He drank more liquor desperately, his brain beginning to reel in the vertigo of drunkenness, with vivid pictures of home, the laugh of voices dearly familiar to him, the flash of smiling faces—as confused as in a dream, and like a dream stirring a torturing regret. He tried to listen to the woman singing "The Star Spangled Banner," and for an instant he got it clear in his ears, but the riot of memory burst in again and he fought it back, struggling with trembling lips and fingers that twitched on his glass.

He turned frantically to the bundle of papers on the

table and tore off the wrapper and spread the first one eagerly. He began with the advertisements, but he could read only the forms of the words; they had no meaning and they marched crazily to the tune in his head. He turned to the pictures. And these were the old fond pictures of snow and sunset, of country homes, of jolly plum-pudding dinners, of girls skating in furs or dancing under the holly. They were the embodiment to his eyes of all that his young Christmas had aspired to be. The million memories of boyhood and youth, of college days and homecoming, of Christmas holidays and Christmas sports stung and tormented him. He turned the pages in a trance of thought, page after page, fascinated. And when he looked up from them he found a nightmare life around him, dinning discordant music in his ears, choking him with the thick heat and the odor of unclean bodies. He ripped the paper up with an oath and threw it on the floor. Then he rose unsteadily and staggered out of the hall.

Don, after one guilty moment of hesitation, shoved back his chair and followed. He came into the barroom as the street door slammed at Conroy's heels. He ran out to the sidewalk and stood facing a curtain of fog behind which Conroy had been lost in an instant. He wandered about the streets, shuddering with the cold and with the horror of having helped to agonize despair. When he came on an elevated station, he accepted the futility of his hope, and turned homewards.

And Conroy, driven from the shelter of his familiar haunts, where he was a known and—in the sodden way of bar-rooms—an honored customer, went lurching

from one saloon to another, attempting, by stupefying himself in a wild debauch, to escape the remorse that drove him along the streets. He had received a Christmas letter that morning from his mother, and the money that she had sent him made a trail behind him as he went. He came to a saloon full of negroes in lower Sullivan street; and in paying the barkeeper he drew out a handful of bills and displayed them with a recklessness that had its inevitable issue, for when he left that bar-room two wolfish mulattos followed him to the street; and the fog closed over the thugs and their victim.

In the morning he was found lying in a passageway that led to a rear tenement, his pockets rifled, insensible from the blow of a black-jack on the back of his head.

THERE was no Christmas Eve dinner in Don's flat that next day. Conroy lay in the hospital, unconscious, between life and death. Bert Pittsey had accused Don of being the blundering cause of each step in his cousin's downfall and the wilful agent of his last undoing. Miss Morris's silence had left him no doubt of her disgust of him. All the failures of his life had crushed down on him together and buried him in the depths.

He sat at midnight, before his writing table, unable to go to bed, staring as if he had seen a ghost; and the ghost that he had seen was the memory of his dead past, risen to rebuke him with the crimes of his incapacity. He saw his mother with that face of sorrow which had so often looked out on him from his dreams. He saw his father leaning across the cluttered dining-table, glaring at him in angry accusation. He saw Miss Mor-

ris watching him from the crowded stage of "The Rajah's Ruby," dumbly tragical. The glazed eyes of Conroy's hatred stared at him like the dull eyes of the dead. He shuddered at the thought that some day Margaret's face might join that company of malevolence and accuse him of the wreck of her life.

Above all, he saw himself moving like a blind fool through this unregarded misery, the execrated cause of it, ruthless and hateful. The elder Miss Morris's cold smile changed into Mrs. McGahn's large-mouthed and voluble exasperation. Walter Pittsey's "Don Quixote" echoed from some forgotten record of his memory with a contemptuous accent. Kidder lectured him. The stage manager of "The Ruby" cursed him. Every disgraceful incident of his life rose to point its finger at him; and he took his head in his hands and groaned.

His very imagination, that had been turned always on the future, cast its light back on his past, now, and illumined it with a baleful vividness. For the first time he saw himself as one might see a character in a book, among the men and women, friends and relatives who had moved and talked and loved and sorrowed around him. He watched them, as one would watch a play, sitting above them, above himself, above life, observing and understanding it all. And slowly, as he watched, the shame of his part in it detached itself from him. He began to study it with a curious aloofness. It had an appearance of unreality, of an illusion from which he had escaped. The illusion of life!

He looked up at the wall before him with the eyes of a trance—seeing the city lying asleep below him, the men and women in their beds, insensible, like discarded

marionettes. Overhead, the moon and the stars stood in their appointed places amid the mystery of space; and the haste and labor of the day were silly to remember, mocked at by the quiet sarcasm of old night. "Life!" he thought. "Life, the great illusion!" He smiled the derisive phantom of a smile; and that smile, he felt, was to be, forever after, the secret aspect and expression of his thought; his happiness was to be of that complexion; his failures, his sorrows, his tragedies were to wear at last something of that same face.

It reminded him of his Emerson, and he reached the volume from the row before him, unseeingly, his mind busy with his thoughts. He turned to a remembered passage in the essay on "Illusions." He read: "There is no chance and no anarchy in the universe. All is system and gradation. Every god is there sitting in his sphere. The young mortal enters the hall of the firmament; there he is alone with them alone, they pouring on him benedictions and gifts and beckoning him up to their thrones. On the instant, and incessantly, fall snowstorms of illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that and whose movements and doings he must obey; he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment new changes and new showers of deception to baffle and distract him. And when, by and by, for an instant, the air clears and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones—they alone with him alone."

The air had cleared! The cloud had lifted! The visionary had caught the first full sight of that vision which was to make the world less real to him thereafter than the matter of his thought. The idealist had fought his way, through the opposition of science and the realities, to his possession of the great ideal. The dreamer had made life itself the dream. Don, full-grown, was ready to achieve his destiny.

At the ringing of the electric bell of his apartment, he rose mechanically; and still staring before him with blind eyes, he went to open his door.

Bert Pittsey was shaking the snow from his hat brim, in the outer hall. "They 've operated on Conroy," he said in a manner that was roughly apologetic. "He 'll recover. I thought you 'd like to know."

Don passed his hand across his eyes. "Yes. Thanks," he said thickly. "Won't you come in?"

Bert studied him. "Were you asleep?"

"No-o."

"Walt was afraid you might be. He would n't come up. He 's downstairs."

Don shook his head, meaninglessly.

"I think I 'll get him. He has some news for you—from Polk."

He disappeared down the stairs. Don went back into his room and sat down to wait, in a sort of numb indifference. He reached an empty pipe and held it with the mouthpiece against his pursed lips. "Come in," he said.

Walter Pittsey smiled down at him. "I was afraid that you might be in bed. I saw Polk this evening. He says there 's 'something' in your 'Winter'—something

that he thinks he could work up into an extravaganza. He wants to see you about it. He 'll probably offer to buy it from you. What do you say?"

He waited, expecting the boyish delight which did not appear. Don did not raise his eyes. "He can have it."

Walter coughed. "Well, you don't seem much excited!"

He laid aside his pipe. "Sit down, won't you? I 'll get Margaret."

He went down the inner hall to their bedroom. Walter Pittsey looked around at Bert. They exchanged glances of amused perplexity. The younger brother laughed: "He 's one too many for me."

But if Don was not enthusiastic, Margaret, in dressing gown and "mules," more than made up his lack of spirit. "Oh Don!" she cried. "Your first play! What did he say? Tell me! Tell me—everything!"

Walter told her what little there was to tell; and Bert added his quota of good news about Conroy. "His father arrived at six o'clock. There was a pressure on the brain. They operated to relieve it, and they 're going to take him home as soon as he can be moved. He wants to go." He turned to Don. "That bump on the head has done the business for him."

Don smiled, crookedly. "I—I hope—" He did not say what he hoped. He leaned forward in his chair and put his face in his hands. "I 'm— I 've had a bad day, I guess," he faltered. "I feel . . . rather . . . knocked out myself."

Margaret went to him, and knelt on the floor beside

him, and put her arm across his shoulders. "Don," she whispered. "What is it? Are you ill?"

He did not answer.

She tried to draw his hands from his face, to see him. She found his fingers wet. "O—oh!" She looked up at the Pittseys, her lips trembling.

They caught up their hats and hurried each other silently out of the room.

And that was the beginning of a success in life that realized all Don's dreams. Polk had found "something" in his "Winter"; he had found, in fact, the promise which the years were to develop, and he took the process of development in hand. The story of Don's progress has already been followed by the dramatic critics—to various conclusions, for they are still uncertain whether he is "a possible successor to the Shakespeare of 'The Tempest' and 'The Midsummer Night's Dream'," or only "an emasculated lyric-opera librettist with a disordered fancy and a naturalistic technique." He says himself, to Margaret: "I don't know—and I don't care—what I am. At one time, I thought I was a fool—because everyone else thought so. Now they tell me I 'm a genius—and, naturally, I 'ha' ma doots.'" In either case, he has found himself; he has found his work; he is happy.

He has kept his promise to Miss Morris. She came back from San Francisco to play the lead in "The Magic Ring," and she made her name in it. When she married Kuffman, she was already known as "the most beautiful woman on the American stage"; Kuffman has

worked all the oracles to make her famous, and though some of the critics still complain that she is stiff, the public is convinced that she is a great and classical tragedienne. To Don she has become a somewhat pathetic puzzle. Her husband worships her—worships her "like a graven image" as Bert Pittsey says. It was Pittsey who nicknamed the pair "Pygmalion and Galatea." He is the dramatic critic of an evening paper, now; and no matter what he writes he tries to write it flippantly. When he is asked why he does not attack the theatrical trust, he explains: "My brother is in it. It 's bad taste to air a purely family quarrel in the newspapers, don't you think?" And when Walter hears of this he clears his throat—and smiles.

For the rest: Don spends a frequent "honeymoon" in Coulton where Conroy, now soberly settled down, is managing a department of his father's business, and F. Grayson Gregg is the junior partner in the law firm of "Gregg and Gregg," and Mr. Gregg no longer tries to hide from himself that he is not as proud of Frank as he is of his other son, "the dramatist." Don still finds his mother, in her invalid chair beside the window, waiting to welcome him with her remembered smile. The peephole still remains in the frosted glass of the nursery door through which he looked at Santa Claus. Margaret and he can still make a smiling pilgrimage to the little ravine where they used to read the "Faerie Queene" together; and there—as if the breath of the firs refreshed the unquenchable youth in him—she finds him still a lover, still a poet in spite of any disillusionment, still a gentle solitary, and still Don-a-Dreams.

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